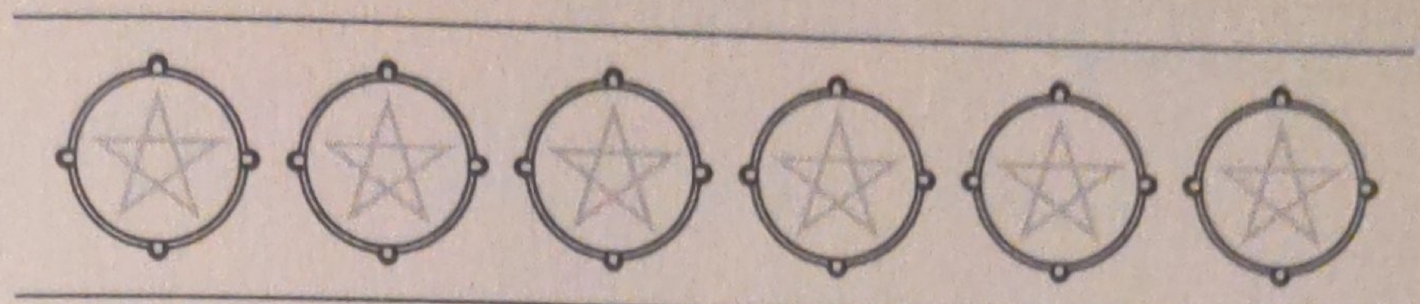
THE RECOVERY SPIRAL

A PAGAN PATH TO HEALING

CYNTHIA JANE COLLINS, M.DIV.

The Recovery Spiral



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To all of us
We know who we are

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INTRODUCTION

Recovery— The Deepest Spell of All

Addictions of any kind will always distort, diminish, and eventually destroy any relationship. If we habitually or compulsively—with or without awareness or intention—use any activity, substance, or person to move us away from our true selves, we are practicing addictive behavior. In so doing, we lose more and more of our genuine selves.

Recovery is about coming back to a genuine state of being, regaining that which has been lost. Spiral describes the constant movement of our lives, honoring the complexity and diversity that is our relationship to reality.

As Pagans we celebrate our world, seeing the Divine in virtually everything and everyone. Many of us believe that we have actively participated in choosing to live the exact life that we are living today. Practicing addictions means that we cannot be truly alive on any level. We waste our opportunities and harm both ourselves and others. The energy we put into deception, dishonesty, and dishonor drains our world, others, and ourselves. Changing that is not as simple as "just saying no," and it cannot be done alone.

This book offers a Pagan perspective on twelve-step recovery. Twelve-step programs have saved lives, increased joy, and seem to work for many, though it is often Christians who find the greatest benefit

from these programs. Traditional twelve-step recovery literature gives only token acknowledgment to non-Christian spirituality. The literature often lacks emphasis on relationships and on broader aspects of the world around us. The basis of the success of twelve-step recovery seems to be the integration of spirituality and relationship into our daily lives. Surely this success can be a part of Pagans' lives as well.

This book uses the principles of loving relationship to give a new perspective on the twelve steps. Steps one and two will be discussed under the heading of "equals." Steps three, four, and five will be explored as "consensus." "Emotional honesty" will be emphasized in Steps six and seven. Steps eight, nine, and ten will focus on "freely giving and freely receiving." The last two steps—eleven and twelve, will be viewed through the lens of "balance."

Pagan 12 Steps

The Pagan 12 Steps were written to reflect the truths of the Wiccan Rede and the Rule of Three as I have experienced them. Below you will find the Pagan 12 Steps placed side by side with the traditional version. The following attribution and disclaimer are from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

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Many Pagans, and especially Wiccans, use the ethical yardstick of the Rede, which says "If it harm none, do as you will." The notion of *harming* starts the journey. It encompasses the idea that we must not

Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. *We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, © 1939.

Pagan 12 Steps

1. We admitted that we were harming ourselves and others and that our lives had become overwhelming.
2. Came to believe that a power within ourselves and our world could restore us to balance.
3. Made a decision to move our wills and our lives toward that Divine Presence.
4. Made a searching and fearless ethical inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves, to the Divine Presence, and to others the exact nature of our harm.
6. Were entirely ready to have our harmful patterns replaced by ethical coping skills.
7. Asked the Divine to transform us, giving us rebirth in our lives.
8. Made a list of all beings we had harmed, beginning with ourselves and including our world, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to all whenever possible, except when to do so would violate the Rede.
10. Continued to take personal ethical inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it and corrected it.
11. Sought through action and meditation to improve our conscious knowledge and contact with the Divine Presence, seeking only to choose in harmony with the greatest good.
12. Having had spiritual awakenings as results of these steps, we offered this opportunity to others and practiced these principles in our lives.

Adapted from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, Cynthia Jane Collins © 1998, 2002.

harm ourselves. Another ethical idea among Pagans is that that whatever energy, emotion, or action we send out—or have sent out—will come back to us in some way. The Rule of Three specifies that these things will return to us three times over. This encourages us to look at our past—perhaps to make better choices to reflect what is currently happening—and to make amends, if that is appropriate. The belief that we can, and do, change the present and the future by acts of our will helps us discover what we can do on a sustained, regular basis. We find that in this process we are doing deep magical work within ourselves, and that this work affects our relationships. The Pagan 12 Steps offer another way to look at our spiritual selves.

Many of the challenges for today's Pagan stem from trying to connect the spiritual, physical, and emotional worlds. We do this in many different ways. I do not speak for all Pagans, Wiccans, or people in recovery. I speak only for myself. I am a Wiccan and therefore a Pagan, and I am in recovery.

Before we explore the Pagan 12 Steps, I want to introduce some ideas that form the basis for this book. As you read them, you may find it valuable to reflect on your most deeply held beliefs.

Pagans

We live in a very scientific age. We have computers with the ability to check our spelling and our grammar. We can break the bonds of Earth's gravity. Food grown thousands of miles away comes fresh to our table. I can speak almost instantly to people in most areas of the world. The weather is an inconvenience for me, not a disaster that threatens my life.

Over the course of little more than two hundred years—a drop in the bucket of time—we in the industrial world who do not make our living from the earth have disconnected from natural rhythms. Our lives are ruled by clocks, calendars, and corporate need, rather than by weather, the cycles of the planets, and the changes of the seasons. Our challenge, as urban Pagans, is to find a way to accommodate both worldviews.

As Pagans, most of us live in this world where light comes from bulbs and heat comes from a stove or furnace. We understand that these changes and gains have not come without losses. Pagans, whatever their

specific practice, seek to be part of the natural rhythms. Addictions hold our awareness of these rhythms away from our consciousness. We use the addiction to stand between ourselves and the reality of change, life, and death.

Spiritual Commitment

In many spiritual expressions, the idea of growth in faith is interwoven with a deepening of one's commitment to a life that focuses more and more on the connection with the Divine. Pagans demonstrate that commitment in very concrete ways. We may recycle paper, do private or public ritual, seek out like-minded groups, or change our jewelry. We may be inclined to bring our faith into the way we relate to others, spend our money, or care for our homes.

Many branches of the Pagan family use a series of markers or initiations to formally acknowledge growth and development in spirituality. These may take the form of ritual, gifts, blessings, dedications, specific practices, and vows. Most of these journeys include learning about a chosen path, deeper work with the self, enhanced contact with the Divine, and practical demonstrations.

Some traditions, especially in Wiccan practice, use a three-degree system. The Second Degree often emphasizes the *shadow* or *dark* side of the self. Here we work to clear away any aspect of the self that holds us back from fulfilling our true potential. We confront, and honor, ourselves and our pasts. When it is time to do this difficult work, the legacy of personal addictions or the addictions of those around us become an issue. The Pagan 12-Step path is one way to do this work, to craft more loving relationships with self, with the Divine, and with others.

Recovery is not an easy path. Life will not be perfect, nor will we. During this work we may become angry, discouraged, or depressed. We may uncover losses, and grief will wash over us in waves. We may be asked to look with new eyes at ourselves and at those we love, or at those we cannot tolerate. We may find that things that did not trouble us have become very uncomfortable. Some concepts may be foreign or difficult. Some we may not like or may not agree with. All of this is okay. One of the wonderful aspects of being a Pagan is that we can try things on for a while and then make an informed choice about what we wish to use.

Do not be afraid to seek help from clergy, trusted friends, or appropriate professionals. Addictions affect the entire person. Physical symptoms, intense emotional responses, recurrent anxiety or depression, violence or chronic fears of any kind, sleep disturbances, or lack of basic food, safety, clothing, or shelter require immediate evaluation and help from someone who has the training and resources to provide it. Asking for assistance when you need it is a sign that you are committed to a path of truth and self-development. You are not in this alone. Your feelings and experiences *do* matter. You have the right and the responsibility to heal and to grow.

For all circumstances, follow your own inner guidance. The most important magical tool for transformation is *you*. You are the one who must make the choices, take the actions, and bear the consequences. If something in this book is helpful to you, use it. If you can change some part of it to make it better for you, please do! If something does not apply to you, put it on a shelf.

Those familiar with twelve-step recovery groups are aware that twelve-step meetings have several different formats. A discussion meeting takes a topic or an idea, and each attendee contributes his or her thoughts and questions. An *open meeting* allows individuals in the group to focus on personal concerns without a specific beginning topic. *Literature meetings* consider the written material that defines the program. *Lead meetings* are when individuals tell their personal story of recovery to the group. *Closed meetings* are for those who acknowledge a direct personal involvement. No "observers" are permitted. The final type of meeting, a *group conscience meeting*, is where the group takes practical and concrete action based on a collective understanding of various concepts. So, too, this book will include discussions, individual examples, personal stories (leads), and exercises.

Remember that a book is not a substitute for personal contact. It is only a way to convey ideas. A rich and viable recovery program cannot be practiced alone. We find others through making contact with local or national groups (specific national contact information is in the Resources section at the end of the book).

The exercises, included in their entirety at the end of this book (see *Recovery Spiral Tarot Manual* and *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*), can be done either alone or with a partner. Tarot work is described in the *Recovery Spiral Tarot Manual*. Spells, rituals, and questions are described in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*. If you prefer not to use Tarot or

ritual work, feel free to modify the exercises in a way that works for you. For example, you can have a friend discuss the issues raised by the positions of the Tarot cards instead of using the cards themselves.

Relationships

Addictions drop veils of dishonesty into any relationship, preventing us from being who we truly are. We are always in relationships. They can be satisfying only when we offer and receive our genuine self. Most Pagans believe that we live in constant contact both with the world and the people of the moment and with the world and people of the past and future. The deep influences, for help or harm, that we all exert on one another over time mean that we need to consider our spirituality in a multitude of contexts.

We must invest energy, time, and resources to form loving and healthy relationships, They do not just happen. Crafting a loving relationship between equals includes struggling to come to consensus, being emotionally honest, freely giving and receiving, and finding and maintaining a balance within our own selves. In *Building a Magical Relationship: The Five Points of Love*, (2002) Jane Raeburn and I explored the beginning steps for those kinds of relationships within a Pagan context.

I believe that relationships between equals are the only kind that can expand to include the full potential of love. One of the most difficult paths for me to travel has been considering myself to be an *equal*. My experiences, emotions, and beliefs are such that I easily evaluate myself as *less than* or *not worthy*.

Part of the reason is the internalized messages from the society in which I live. Our culture gives us very specific (and often contradictory) guides to thinking, feeling, behaving, and being. These messages can be stifling, unrealistic, and destructive. They demand that we replace our genuine emotions, needs, wants, and thoughts with something we perceive is more acceptable or better. Our desire is not to hurt others and to comfort ourselves in some way. Anything that is used consistently to move us away from reality is potentially addictive. These things can include substances such as alcohol, sugar, drugs (prescription or recreational), or processes such as shopping, eating, fantasizing, or playing on the Internet. Addiction is the process of denying our own reality by regularly allowing a process or substance to change that reality.

Sometimes we manage to overcome one or more specific addictions. Yet without an underlying change in our spiritual selves, we are left with a legacy of fear, guilt, confusion, and shame. We find ourselves asking how others can have good relationships. Why not me? Is there something basically wrong with me? With others? Have I done something wrong in a past life? Have I failed to do the proper spellwork? Is it my physical appearance or a handicap, whether real or imagined? Where have I failed? Why is it I seem to end up with the toads? Am I not lovable?

Eventually our self-doubts may lead us to explore our present behaviors, our future expectations, and our pasts. This is a very difficult task, because we are all too close to the "trees" of our everyday lives to see the "forest" of our whole lives and selves. All types of addictions eviscerate our spirituality, from which all love emanates.

Love

I cannot imagine love being genuine if active addictions (process or substance) are involved. The addict places the "fix" first and thus cannot be in an "equals" relationship (with self or others). The time, energy, and resources that could be available to self or others are spent on the addiction. A great deal of this book will explore, confront, and attempt to banish any form of addiction. The rest of the book seeks to explore, experience, and choose loving behaviors instead.

Love can become a catchword and we seek to be called *loving*. The word has connotations of trying to please others. It is easy to ignore ourselves, to be loving, and thus seek emotional buttressing, not from doing what is right for ourselves and others but from doing what is approved.

When we realize that we live in a world with others, truly loving helps us understand that our first responsibility is to ourselves. In love, we choose to act on first things first.

For me, love develops only under certain conditions. As much as I like the notion of unconditional love—which may be possible for other types of beings—the truth is that I experience reality in a linear way. If eating cookies feels good, I will probably do it again. If finishing this book is difficult, yet I feel fulfilled afterward, I may do something like

it again. If my hand is burned when I stick it in the flames, I will not be eager to repeat the experience.

When we are in the grip of addictions, our choices are constrained by the need to continue to use the process or the substance that gives us relief from inner pain. We cannot afford to truly love, be vulnerable and connected, because it hurts too much.

When we begin to examine our patterns around addictions, we ask ourselves about our relationships, especially the ones that seem to be important. We understand that the family who raised us (adopted, extended, blood, or chosen) had a significant impact. We know that our choice of friends, lovers, and even pets can also have an influence. It may be more difficult to understand the impact of the way we spend our time, energy, and resources (i.e., at work, in community service, alone reading). Our behaviors and attitudes are not choices that we make without context. We are often taught by our upbringing to use addictive patterns to cope with painful or upsetting situations or feelings.

We are often uncomfortable bringing our rational abilities to a question about feelings. Feelings are so immediate, so real, so compelling, and *so* unpredictable. Thinking seems to take a backseat when our emotions are driving our bodies, until, of course, we begin to realize that there may be consequences to our actions.

In addiction, our body chemistry literally changes; using drugs or alcohol has an obvious effect. A bit subtler, but no less real, are the chemical effects of caffeine, sugar, and other ingested substances. Even more subtle are the effects of adrenaline, serotonin, and other hormones that become aroused when we shop, have sex, clean house, gamble, play games, gossip, or exercise instead of dealing with uncomfortable things. Most of us do things like this sometimes. It is addictive when the substance, or processes are used to consistently stand between us and reality.

Our culture sends extremely strong messages about how important relationships are for providing happiness. We may run in screaming fear from any aspect of emotional connection, or we may label a casual acquaintance as a soul mate. We may cut ourselves off from those who really do care for us while clinging to those who, wittingly or not, are harming us. If our real-life relationships don't measure up to the culture's fantasy, we may find a way to deny that we don't have the perfect

picture. One way to do this is to cover our feelings or intuitions, or mask the simple reality of our lives by placing something like a chemical or a process between us and our reality. It is easy to allow some wine to blur the shape of our anger or to buy a present we cannot afford to prove that we care about someone. In our fog of addiction, we do not offer the only gift we can uniquely give, which is our unclouded presence.

This is made harder by not being comfortable with knowing what we feel, naming it, and then finding some way to express it. Then there is the thorny problem of what others might be experiencing. To make things even more complicated, there are other relationships that may be, or have been, a part of our lives. And then there is the influence of those who raised us, and the substances or processes that we and those closest to us use as shields.

We have some standards of behavior around caring and loving in relationships. Much literature describes the kinds of actions we can look for to receive or give *clues*. To begin to know ourselves better, we can use these relationship clues to help us. If we use addictions to deny our reality, it is easy to gloss over the specific answers to these questions, or to pick out only the parts of the relationship that are familiar or comfortable.

- How much time do we spend together?
- What kinds of words do we use to describe each other?
- How much energy do we give to the relationship?
- How do we feel around the other?
- Are there "complications" and how do we handle them?
- What says caring to each of us—gifts, flowers, time together, cards, terms of affection, words, quiet times, activities, manners, help with the housework, a new half-inch drill?
- Does romantic love mean monogamy, commitment, children, or other things?
- What about love that is not romantic, such as that between a parent and a child, between siblings, friends, or other family members?

Our Bodies

When we are involved in addictions, a chemical process happens in our bodies. Serotonin, adrenaline, and endorphins are chemicals that help

us feel more alive, better, less anxious. We receive data from the world around us and from other people. If there are chemical changes in our bodies, we cannot receive the simple and true data. We become dependent on seeing the world through altered lenses.

We compare this distorted data to our experience and then decide what to do about it. For example, if I am feeling unsure of myself at work, I might go shopping. I experience the thrill of power and choice. I select the best, or most reasonably priced, or perfect things, and I get an adrenaline rush from the process. I feel better. The data—that there is power and choice in the world I inhabit—are distorted. I haven't dealt with my feelings of insecurity about not having power or choice at work.

The Past

As magical people, we know that the energy we send out comes back, perhaps three times or ten times, or perhaps only once. Unfortunately, this is not a clear, simple process. If we send out loving energy today, we do not get a UPS parcel tomorrow filled with three buckets of love. What happens is a great deal more like getting a parcel filled with advertising brochures, stale candy bars, a beautiful bouquet of flowers, bills, unmatched socks, and a newspaper written in a language we don't speak. In other words, what we experience receiving is much more mixed than a single sending, and not all of what we receive is "ours."

What we are able to send—to ourselves or others—depends on what we have available to us at any time. What we have *now* is directly dependent on what we had *before*. Thus we are *now* a mix of the resources that were and are available to us and of how they were and are used. Our choices now deeply influence the future, and depend in large part on what is in the past. Our family of origin, with their strengths and weaknesses, their addictions and patterns; the influence of our cultures; and our own specific experiences and coping skills—as well as our intentions for the present and the future—are all jumbled together.

As magical people, we know that our power, directed by our will, can change reality. To gather our power and our will for helpful or harmful change can be a long and involved task. This book offers one way to choose our present and our future by doing the deep work necessary to honor our part in the past and to move in love toward the future.

Gathering Our Power and Our Will

I wish it were as easy as "just doing it"! I wish I could just have the willpower to stop or start. I wish it were as simple as saying, "Well, *I* don't drink, smoke, spend, or play games inappropriately. It's not my problem." Or, "You would, too, if you were in *my* position."

Simply making a decision, or expressing even a heartfelt wish, does not make it happen. The depth of misery, self-rejection, or hopelessness that comes with trying and failing to "get it together" is not enough of a motivator to bring about lasting and helpful change. I have not known anyone who was able to maintain a healthy and grateful abstinence over time after kicking an addiction (or three) to please someone else or to avoid pain or punishment. A spiritual and consensual component is necessary to bring intention together with action.

We do this through a process of

- facing our current reality.
- choosing to hope that our lives can be more loving.
- accepting the necessity of change.
- honorably using our freedom to bring about that change.
- celebrating the joy of love in our everyday lives.

Because society, family, friends, schools, and businesses overtly or covertly endorse coercion, violence, rigidity, and all manner of inequality, we will find our journey is difficult. Many times, we do not find support around us. We question ourselves because it seems as though so many are going in another direction or fail to see the value of what we are doing.

We are beset on all sides by the consequences of our own actions and the actions of others when we or they have been influenced by some form of addictive behavior. These influences skew our reality, squander our power, and strangle our love. Our world is one of connection and mutuality, as well as boundaries and individual responsibility. We are very fortunate that many have come before us who have honored both their individual responsibility and their connectedness by sharing what they have learned. I am one of those fortunate ones who learned from those who were willing to share and to teach. This story sets the stage for my journey.

Cynthia Speaks

When I was a little girl, I liked to watch *Captain Kangaroo*. I ate my breakfast at the kitchen table, and then I went into the living room and watched *Captain Kangaroo* on the television.

One day, I had just turned on the television and I heard a loud CRASH BANG BANG BOOM WHOOSH CRASH in the dining room. I turned around and I saw that there was no roof in the dining room anymore. I was very scared.

Mommy came out of the kitchen and looked at the hole in the roof. Then she looked at me. She said, "Don't worry about it, Cynthia. It's okay. Just go on and watch your show."

I didn't know what else to do. So I went back to the TV. I put my scared feelings very deep down inside me so they would not show.

I was not quite four years old. I know today that a tornado had ripped part of the roof off of our house. For some reason, the electrical power was not affected, so the TV still worked. I know today that my mother had been drinking that morning and her ability to perceive and interpret reality was impaired. She had no idea how to cope with the situation. She did not know how to address questions of basic safety. My mother pretended it was not a problem. I did not know how to cope either, so I followed her lead. My mother's behavior and my response to her behavior have had a lasting impact on me. I learned a pattern of denial that haunts me in every area of my life, beginning with the relationship I have with my own self and my perceptions.

My response then was quite appropriate for the time and circumstances. It is not appropriate to expect a child of that age to cope with such a problem on her own. I did what I thought I had to do to survive. Today I would not choose to ignore a life-threatening crisis. I have learned over time that this does not serve me. Today I choose to take crisis seriously. I can take action to bring myself, and those in my care, to a safe place.

To move from the old response to the response I would choose today requires that I recognize and honor what I "naturally wanted" to do—ignore it—and what I knew I "really wanted" to do. I could not do that until I did deep magic with myself, using the 12 steps.

1

FACING REALITY:
The Principle of Equals
Steps One and Two

Reality constantly changes; therefore, we constantly change. We seek to satisfy our needs and wants by adjusting our environment, others, our perceptions, or ourselves. When we are using harmful behaviors to stand between ourselves and reality, we do not make changes that are in our own or others' best interests, because we are spiritually unable to do so. Addictions affect us on every level—body, mind, heart, and spirit, and they affect all of our relationships—past, present, and future. The recovery spiral starts with reclaiming our bodies, our reality, our authenticity, and our truth.

To honor the East, the place of new beginnings, hope and creativity, *we honor ourselves as equal to others*. This means that my history and experience, wants and needs, hopes and fears, are no more or less important—though they may at times be more or less urgent—than those of others. I need to honor myself as well as others with time, energy, and resources. Over time, things should equal out.

I cannot do that if I do not know who and what I am, who I have been and what I have done. Process or substance addictions keep me from knowing those things. They obscure my reality. I cannot have an *equals* relationship with anyone—especially myself—if my addiction's

seductions come first or if protecting my supply (e.g., of good feelings, chemicals) comes first.

To make a new beginning, I must first face the reality that the old no longer serves me in the way it did. To have hope, I must affirm that the present and the future are not inevitable, unchangeable results of factors I can no longer influence. To be creative, I must communicate with my spirit and the spirit of the world and others around me.

Unfortunately, new beginnings, hope, and creativity are not simply had for the wishing. Here are some reasons why:

- Our lives are hectic.
- Our available time is less than we imagined.
- Our commitments are greater than we realize.
- Our energy level can get so low that it seems almost too much effort to get off the sofa or out of bed.
- Our past may revisit us in surprising ways.
- Crises happen way too often.
- We receive less and give more.
- We discover unexpected expenses.
- We find our good intentions buried under pressures.
- We notice ourselves doing and experiencing things reactively.

When we don't have the time, energy, and resources to nurture good feelings coming from ourselves, we may find it easy to substitute a substance or a process for genuine experience. Once in a while, this is okay. When it becomes something we depend on to get us through a difficult situation, however, we are moving into active addiction.

We may do the same things over and over, yet expect different results. We are disappointed and discouraged. Things that once delighted us or seemed like fun are now emptier. Things that at one time eased our sense of loneliness, guilt, fear, or hurt no longer help as much. We need more to get the effect we used to get. We find ourselves trapped. How can we keep on like this?

We become aware of a growing restlessness. Perhaps, at first, it is just a notion that things are not turning out quite the way we hoped. A bit later, there may be incidents, feelings, or intuitions that, in and of themselves, are not that big a deal. Perhaps we notice that what we are creating in our lives is compromising our own beauty, honor, and truth.

Perhaps the way this comes to our attention is the effect our personal compromises have on others.

We eventually realize that we cannot continue on this path, no matter how uncomfortable the alternatives. We struggle with our old behaviors and experience how difficult it is to change them. We find the only way is to change ourselves. The language of the twelve-step programs calls this a "spiritual awakening." This is not a bolt out of the blue. We do not wake up one morning and find our problems are solved. This awakening is the result of some very hard work.

The First Step:

Cynthia Speaks

Twelve-step recovery acknowledges that awareness is the beginning of growth and change. In the early 1970s, I came to the realization that my drug use was harming me. I quit using those particular substances and replaced them with other, less illegal, less overtly harmful, substances and processes. I went from street drugs and "free love" to sugar and no interest in sexuality. It never occurred to me to seek professional help. There seemed to be no help from my peers. The notion of a twenty-something-year-old female with a drug problem in the same program with alcoholics was silly. I didn't have the words or experience to *qualify* for a "sincere desire to stop drinking."

In 1979, I did find a warm welcome in another twelve-step program for those who are emotionally or physically connected to alcoholics. In the '80s, I again found a warm welcome in another program, for the children of substance abusers. Initially I experienced a blush of joy at discovering others who had been through some of the same things I had.

Growing up, I had felt isolated and unable to connect with others my age. My experiences were never discussed, and I pushed down my real feelings in favor of ones that seemed more "normal." My interests in spirituality, art, and reading, as well as my deep, unshared, and unarticulated pain, had seemed to set me apart from peers. I had always considered myself "terminally unique," and the commonality of lives and responses reassured me.

I developed a love/hate relationship with the first step. The original version says, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." I found some very creative ways to try to get around it. I continue to be amazed that even knowing these rationalizations and intellectualizations are harmful and not helpful, I still use them just as unsuccessfully as ever.

- One of my favorite ways to deal with stress is to pick any spoken or printed word to death. (*So who is "we," and what authority is behind this statement?)*
- I rationalize why this is not about me. (*My life is difficult, but I've "managed" reasonably well.*)
- I set up a false either/or situation. (*Either my life is unmanageable, which it clearly is not because I pay my bills, or my life is manageable.*)
- I like to continue this little exercise in self-delusion with a bit of reasoning of that sounds rational but is clearly insane. (*My life, being manageable as clearly evidenced by the fact that I have a roof over my head and the electricity has not been cut off, also necessarily implies that I indeed have great power over alcohol.*)
- I then cleverly repress anything that intrudes. (*My power over alcohol is such that I only drink when I choose to drink, and my manageable life endorses my occasional celebration where I may pass out. My parents also paid their bills, so there is no possibility that they had problems. Therefore I had a perfect childhood.*)
- And finally, I ignore any responses that would not support my conclusions. (*My partner is just oversensitive and stressed out and didn't really mean to say what I heard. The kids are just high-spirited and energetic.*)

These are all forms of denial, the glue that holds together the shaky structure of life when process or substance abuse is involved.

Over time, I did find that my intellectualizing was not helping me. I was miserable enough to try almost anything, so I tried using the steps as written. Miraculously, they worked.

After I was "better," I began to notice that I seemed to need

something more, especially in terms of spirituality and deeper healing. I sincerely tried to use the "spiritual" books, meetings, and therapy around the programs. Yet I found myself occasionally pulling even, but overall getting worse instead of better. Part of what baffled me was the sense that the twelve steps were an excellent blueprint for life and growth. I just didn't know where to go with them. I did know that for me to access my own truth, my inner self that touches the Divine, I had to follow a deeper and different path, one that also connected me with the world around me. I had connected deeply with the feminist spirituality of the late 1960s, with the art of Judy Chicago and others, and the stories that came from Pagan myths about the goddesses.

Over the years of practicing twelve-step recovery, I found myself more and more irritated with the covert Christianity or other specific belief systems, the overt hypocrisy and gossip, the lack of personal ethical development. I realized that the groups seemed more and more like the home in which I grew up, and that was not good for me. Yet each time I'd be ready to give up on the program, I'd encounter a personal crisis that led me back to the steps or to a group that really was working, or some fellow Pagans who were open about their struggles with the covert religious stuff.

Part of my spiritual problem, as I see now, was that most mainline faiths use "sin" as a basis for defining humankind, the material realm, and the world. Their definitions range from a mild distaste for the present to the notion that everything and everyone is somehow so flawed that their version of God is cosmically disgusted. When I try to work with the steps, especially when I am in crisis, I sense that I have to start by apologizing for even being alive. At the same time, I have to assume everyone else is much better than I am (in almost any way). This either/or attitude puts blinders on me and encourages me to continue in my denial cycle about the reality of who I am, what choices I have made, the effect my choices have had on others, and the effect others' choices have had on me.

On the other hand, many Pagans, myself included, use working definitions that are not so quick to place blame.

I eventually encountered the writings of Anne Wilson Schaeff, author of *When Society Becomes an Addict* (1988), and they

changed my life. While affirming the twelve steps, Schaeff clearly, compassionately, and relentlessly describes the addictive process and applies the process to all types of interactions. She emphasizes that there is a social as well as an individual context in which we exercise our addictions or our recovery.

I then encountered systemic family therapy, which harmonized with her writings. It gave me a whole new mental "map" for thinking and acting. The idea is that we are impacted by and impact the world—or system—around us. The systems can be small or large, human or natural, organized or chaotic. The idea of genuine interaction and outcomes, rather than the fantasy I had been pretending was reality, gave me a way to acknowledge my experience and responsibility.

Finally, I made an agonizing decision to simply be who and what I am. This sounds simple, but it wasn't. Among the choices I made were a series of personal boundaries that affected all my relationships, especially with the Divine.

After these choices, I spent some serious time considering the steps in light of my understanding. Several years ago, I rewrote them to reflect a Pagan/Wiccan consciousness. A number of people from other meetings were considering forming a new group (not affiliated with the AA/Al-Anon family) that was openly Pagan and encouraged anyone who worked twelve-step recovery to attend. I offered my version of the steps, and we started the group.

My version changed the moral context to an ethical one. I am interested in personal responsibility rather than following a particular moral code, especially as many of the twelve-step programs' idea of proper moral code is essentially Christian. I use a modified version of the Rede (harm none, beginning with yourself, then do as you will) to express those ethics.

Many Pagans believe in a balance between the feminine and the masculine Divine energy, or that gender is irrelevant to the idea of deity. Some affirm only female Divinities. To leave room for all these beliefs, I changed the masculine pronoun for God to a nonspecific Divine.

My version of the first step is

We admitted that we were harming ourselves and others and that our lives had become overwhelming.

Continuum of Use, Misuse, and Dependence

We do not have to match any of the stereotypes of users, abusers, or victims to see that our lives are overwhelming. We don't have to be in an extreme situation like jail or bankruptcy. We don't have to be in a hospital or homeless shelter to know that our lives are overwhelming. Our partner or our parents don't have to be in treatment for domestic violence. We or our loved ones don't have to lose a job or a scholarship. We don't have to point to one specific thing and say that it is the biggest problem. We don't have to be able to say that at any point in time, any specific addiction became a problem.

Recovery is a spiral, wherein we find deeper and broader ways to grow and change. Use, misuse, and dependence are also spirals wherein we find deeper and broader ways to harm ourselves and others. They are both continuums, not black-or-white situations.

The Pagan 12 Steps don't go in a straight line. They are more like a spiral staircase than a ladder. The 12 Steps are a continuum of recovery. It is normal and healthy to find ourselves going back and forth among the steps, finding new combinations and ways to help ourselves and others.

The spiral of use—the active pursuit of any addictive substance or process—has three aspects. Often this begins with simple *curiosity*. We wonder what it would be like to be able to have enough money to buy the nicer sweater? What would it be like to be as sophisticated as the guy in the magazine who is having a glass of fine wine? Would I fit in better if I were a different weight? We try these things, and after satisfying our curiosity and making a reasonable judgment, we repeat the behavior occasionally, or we don't. It isn't a big deal one way or the other. For example, I like many kinds of chocolate. Milk chocolate is okay, but not spectacular. I would eat it again, but if I don't, then my life will still go on.

The next kind of use is *social* or *recreational* use. I'd have some milk chocolate candy if that was being served. I probably wouldn't have a second helping, but eating it might enhance the social function. Or, I might buy a new outfit for going to Renaissance dances. I wouldn't normally buy such a thing, but looking at my budget and my level of participation, I might decide that the moderate expense was appropriate for this recreational use.

The third kind of use is *situational.* When I have surgery, I take the painkillers the physician prescribes. I feel a bit down, so I comfort myself with some yummy dark chocolate cake and a glass of milk. I'm bored so I play a computer game. My beloved pet gets sick, and I'm sad, so I spend all afternoon watching cartoons instead of cleaning the house. I take a day off from work to catch up on the sleep I didn't get because I stayed up too late after ritual the night before. I don't say anything about the mess other people made in the kitchen because it's easier to clean it up myself than to track the messy people down and ask them to do it.

These types of use are within normal coping skills. The use of a substance or process may put something between reality and us for a brief time, and we see these behaviors as temporary. It is important to see that all of these behaviors are *reactive,* not active. Each one is in response to a stimulus, not something chosen by the individual for growth, change, or joy.

The next category is intensified use, or misuse. In this continuum of addiction, misuse is a definite signal that something is wrong. The stimulus to which we reacted initially may or may not be a factor now. What we are now reacting to is not reality, but our perception of reality, based on the past or fear of the future. We begin to ignore contemporary circumstance and become anxious about our ability to cope with what will come our way. We might have really liked the feelings we got when we used the process or substance—perhaps we were more relaxed, or confident, or comforted when we put this between ourselves and reality.

Our feelings or perceptions were more comfortable for us within a certain "window." If we look at only what we can see through a particular window, we see only very specific things. Do I want to look at my garbage cans out the back window, or the lovely tree I can see from the dining room? Paralleling normal use, we do look at the tree, but we don't ignore the garbage cans. To continue this metaphor, addictions place blinds, curtains, or cardboard over the back window. Perhaps we even board up the back door, let the garbage pile up in the hallway, and pretend we don't even have a back room! And we do this because the view out the dining-room window seems to be better. Even when the tree is uprooted and replaced by a parking lot, we cling to the view out of the dining-room window.

We really don't want to find ourselves out of control, but the "window" is very seductive. We strive to reproduce that window, placing it between reality and ourselves by reproducing the behaviors. The same thing doesn't work any longer, so we have to make some adjustments. The frequency of experimental, social, recreational, or situational use increases. The amount or type of substance or process necessary to get the desired effect changes or increases. Sometimes other substances or processes are added. We may try to conceal what we are doing. We perhaps justify this specific "using" by saying that no one would understand, or it isn't really anyone's business.

Full-blown dependency, or compulsive use, is not a long way down on the continuum of addiction from misuse. There is a gradual, not instant, change. The process or substance becomes an accepted, even approved, part of the addict's life and pattern. Remembering the specifics is not that important. Did I spend twelve dollars or fifteen dollars at the store? Did I throw up once or twice last week? How many games did I actually play? Does it really matter? No, because the overall pattern is established. It helps us continue to use if we do not keep a good reality check on ourselves. We are surprised when the scale is seven pounds "off." We didn't realize that we had smoked two cartons this week. We don't add up the number of hours we spent "helping" our family doing things they could appropriately do for themselves. We don't want to know how much energy we put into work.

We no longer try to hide the fact of our use. We agree that we are a chronic do-gooder, or that we have a penchant for chocolate. We may still try to cover up the specific frequency, amount, or type of use. We have a sense that if certain people knew, they would be critical of us.

The effects of our use on ourselves begin to change. The mood enhanced by giving in to a small treat becomes overlaid with shame or guilt. The fun and camaraderie we experienced when drinking becomes hollow. The satisfaction we received from helping out a friend becomes an onerous duty.

We begin to fear life without our addiction, to the point that we start protecting our supply—overtly or covertly. We make ourselves indispensable at work or home. We buy a few extra supplies. We look for ways to "legitimately" use our addictive substance or process on a regular basis.

We learn that changing our job, friends, residence, partner, or hobby is only a temporary fix. Eventually, our old patterns catch up with us.

We find ourselves lying, making excuses, not telling the whole truth to ourselves or others, manipulating, cheating, disobeying common sense or the law, and feeling more and more isolated. We continue to use despite negative consequences or decreased functioning in any area of our lives. Physical issues, such as withdrawal symptoms or nutritional compromise, may place a negative impact on our overall health.

A final telling marker of our dependency on substance or process is a desire to kill ourselves or others as a way to solve problems or make things better. Clinically, this is called "suicidal or homicidal ideation," and it should always be taken very seriously. We may be so dependent that we do not see suicide or homicide as that big a deal. It is a big deal. Always. Tell someone else, and keep telling people until someone trained does something effective and the desire to kill or to die goes away. What that effective help will be is dependent on the situation, but death is not the answer, ever. Many of us can and do experience overwhelming addictions without these thoughts—addictions that can still harm us and others.

In the following story, Elaine's addictive need to help others gets in the way of seeing the reality of herself and her family.

Elaine's Story

It was 10:30 P.M. Elaine sighed as she glanced at the caller ID on the family-room phone. It was her sister Barb again. Elaine's kids, Hannah and Dusty, were finally in bed. Elaine had really hoped for a little time for herself tonight. She struggled a moment with what she knew would become a major guilt trip if she didn't answer. Finally, she gave herself a talking-to and decided to let it ring.

When the ringing stopped, she felt relieved. She settled down with a book, a warm blanket for her feet, a cup of tea, and some cookies. Elaine took a deep breath. She imagined all of her concerns about work as dandelion puffballs. As she exhaled, she blew away the puffs, symbolically ridding herself of the stresses and worries. She did that three more times, once each for her kids, her partner Sandy, and her finances.

About halfway through the second chapter the phone rang again. By force of habit, and still partly in the world of the book, she did what she said she wouldn't do. She answered the phone.

"Hi, Elaine. It's Barb. Sorry about hanging up earlier. The puppy was chewing on my draperies. What's new?"

Caught up in her own guilt, Elaine responded politely. "Hi. Not much new. What's going on with you?" So much for the book, the quiet, and the tea.

When Sandy came home from work after midnight, Elaine was still talking to Barb. The tea was cold and the box of cookies gone. As usual, Barb and Elaine ended their conversation when Sandy got home from second shift.

Sandy was full of talk about the rumors at work, and Elaine was pleased that Sandy seemed to be sober. As they prepared for bed, Elaine began to caress Sandy. They were starting to enjoy snuggling and being focused on each other, when the smoke detector in the kitchen began to sound.

Elaine left the bed in a panic and ran through the kitchen, heading for the kids' rooms. On the way, she discovered the cause. Eleven-year-old Dusty had awakened hungry and put some leftover pizza in the toaster oven. He became engrossed in the music on his headphones, wandered back to bed, and completely forgot the pizza. Between the headphones and the distance from the kitchen to his room, he hadn't heard the alarm. Dusty was confused when his mom came into the room screaming.

Back in bed, all desire for making love gone, Sandy went to sleep quickly. Elaine couldn't seem to settle down. Her nose was itchy. No position was really relaxing, or the right temperature. The more she tried to sleep, the more awake she felt. She couldn't seem to meditate. She got up and took two sleeping pills. After about forty-five more minutes of tossing and turning, Elaine got out of bed, telling herself that if she was awake she might as well do something useful and not waste the time.

She went into the kitchen and began to clean up the mess from the burned pizza. As she was searching for a particular cleaner under the sink, she found a partly empty bottle of vodka, way in the back behind some plastic bags and other junk.

Elaine straightened up, holding the bottle, confused and disbelieving. She and Sandy had quit drinking the hard stuff months ago. They had realized that there was a problem with their drinking. Together, they had decided that buying or keeping alcohol in the house was too

much of a temptation for them both. They both agreed that even an occasional drink with friends was not a good thing for either one. Sandy still smoked pot once in a while, and occasionally she would do a little cocaine. Elaine believed that Sandy used these drugs only on special occasions, or when she was out with her work friends. That was okay with Elaine because it didn't happen very often.

Elaine sat at the table. She saw the envelope for Hannah to take back to her third-grade teacher tomorrow, acknowledging that no report card had come home last Friday, and would the school please send a copy by mail? Where was Hannah's report card?

"What else can go wrong?" thought Elaine. "At least I'm on top of things at work." But as she congratulated herself on being in control in one area, she began to have a niggling feeling that she'd forgotten something. She couldn't seem to pin it down. "Not the Sheridan report. Not the birthday cake for George. Not the proposal for the Beech account."

Feeling numb, exhausted, and faintly worried, Elaine went back to her chair in the family room. As she pulled the blanket up it occurred to her that it would be wonderful just to pull the blanket over her head and hide from her life. She thought about the partial bottle of vodka and realized that it just might be an old bottle, forgotten in the purge before Thanksgiving. With a little more reflection Elaine remembered pouring clear vinegar into the old bottle when she wanted to get rid of the larger container.

Perhaps Hannah had not received the report card, or maybe she lost it accidentally. Dusty was a growing boy, and hunger was normal for him. And she was probably just so used to worrying about work that she did it without real cause. She picked up the abandoned book and finally read herself to sleep.

She woke up to the sound of a loud knock at the kitchen door. Glancing at the clock, she noticed it was 8:20. 8:20! Oh no! She hadn't set the alarm! Everyone was still asleep. Foggy and groggy herself, she opened the door to see her neighbor holding a towel-wrapped, faintly mewing kitten.

"Is this your cat? I found it under your bushes while I was hanging out my laundry."

Hannah appeared in her pajamas dragging a robe. "What is it, Mommy? Can we keep it? I promise I'll feed it."

Elaine turned and snapped at Hannah: "*No!* And what would you feed it anyway, burned pizza and vodka?"

Her daughter's tears, the sound of her own voice, and the shocked look on her neighbor's face helped her realize that she was out of control.

Elaine was overloaded. She had to almost steal time to be with herself. Private rituals Elaine and Sandy had enjoyed when they first shared an apartment were simply nonexistent. Elaine missed her spirituality, the lazy walks in the park, and the chance to enjoy the home she and Sandy had worked so hard to buy.

Elaine missed having an extra few dollars here and there for just spending, but financial problems were not new. Money had been scarce since she divorced Barry, her children's father. She thought back to when she and Sandy were just friends. Sandy had a large apartment, and they decided that it would be great to share the expenses. Over time, she and Sandy got closer and closer. They discovered that they really cared about each other, and that living together suited them very well. It surprised them both, but they decided that they wanted to commit to each other as life partners. They did a lot of soul-searching and eventually told their families about their decision. Elaine's family didn't seem to care much so long as Dusty and Hannah were well cared for. Sandy's family angrily rejected the arrangement.

The cost for Elaine to claim some privacy was often guilt, failure, shame, and irritability, or simply sleep deprivation. The thing she wanted most was some relief from the chaos around her. Because Elaine was a loving and caring person, she truly wanted the others in her life to be happy. Her mistake was believing that she *should* and *could* make others happy or attentive or sober or considerate. She tried to do that by demonstrating those behaviors herself. Elaine said she was "happy" to hear about her sister's puppy and life. She was attentive to the details of being part of a household. She herself had not touched a drop of alcohol for more than a year. She tried to think the best of Sandy and the kids, assuming that they would not be deliberately going against just plain common sense.

She was late for work, and the rest of the house, depending on her to get *them* up, was way behind schedule. Throughout that day and the next, Elaine realized that she was not really helping herself or her family. She was just too overwhelmed.

When she and Sandy had sought help for their drinking more than

a year before, Elaine had picked up a copy of a meeting list and stuffed it in the bottom of a file drawer. She knew she needed someone to talk to. She dug out the list, and noticed a Pagan 12-Step group. She was particularly interested because she and Sandy had actually met at a group ritual, though each was practicing primarily as a solitary at the time.

In the years they had been together, time for shared spirituality had become less and less. Thus, she thought she might give this group a try, even though the day and place were inconvenient.

Saturday morning she awoke at 7 A.M. to make the meeting on the other side of town. Only three other people were there, but they seemed to understand about being overwhelmed. The more Elaine listened, the more she came to understand that she might indeed be addicted to helping others. Somebody suggested that she look over the "harm questions" and then do the Tarot spread that went with it. One member of the group, Camilla, offered to do the first-step questions Tarot spread for her. She readily agreed.

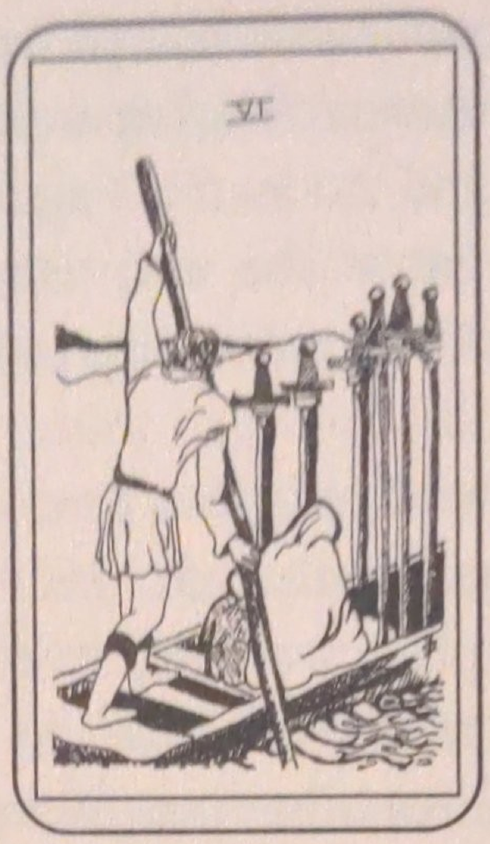
The King of Wands, emanating an aura of confidence, eagerness to be of help and enthusiasm, represented the behavior that was bothering her. Elaine saw in this figure how she had been pretending outwardly to be in control and happy, when inside she was scared, tired, and overwhelmed. The reversed Two of Cups represented the type of harm she was experiencing. It indicated that her primary relationship was still one of love, but disagreements and misunderstanding were causing them to grow farther apart.

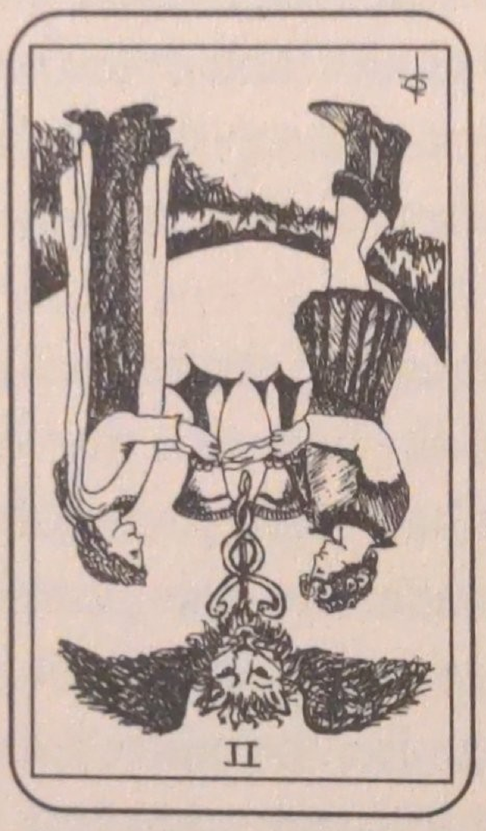
"Too true," she said. "I'm almost afraid to see what is going on with Sandy."

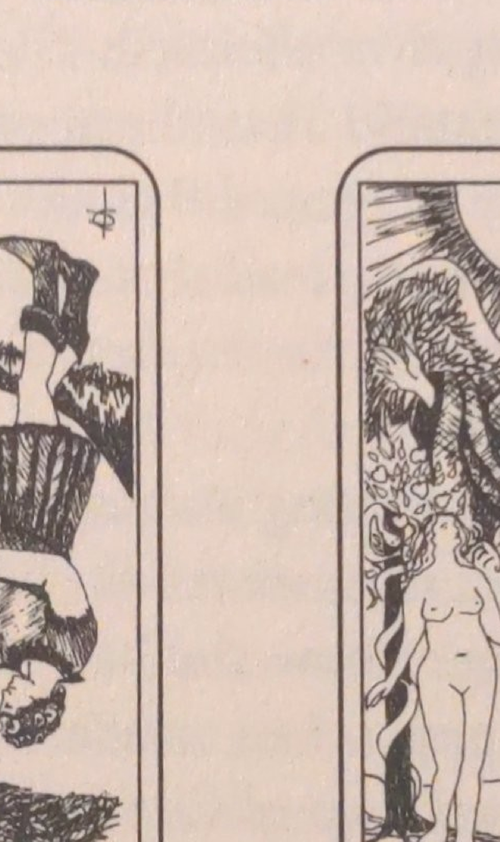
That card, the Lovers upright, indicated that Sandy saw things as just fine.

Relieved, she asked her new friend to continue the reading with the specifics of time, energy, and resources. The time card, the reversed Page of Cups, told Elaine that hiding her true emotions was making it more difficult for her to take direct and timely action. The 6 of Swords in the energy position pointed out that she was trying to get away from her problems by moving away from them, rather than dealing with them. The Devil appearing in the resources spot confirmed that she was focusing too much on the material and overt aspects of things.

Elaine shook her head, wanting to pretend that this didn't make any







ELAINE'S STEP ONE
READING

sense for her. Yet, as she looked at the little pyramid of cards, it was clear that her pretending wasn't helping. It was actually harming, and she didn't want that. It would take a while for her to believe in her heart that she really was harming herself and others.

Phil's Story

Phil looked at the bedroom clock when his pager went off. It was his brother Carl, and it was after midnight. Phil didn't realize he had talked to Megan for more than two hours, and she still hadn't agreed to go out with him.

He called his brother back, afraid that something had happened. Carl asked if he could come over and spend the night. Phil readily agreed and put on a pot of coffee.

A few moments later, Carl opened the back door. He was obviously upset, and Phil knew better than to push him. As Carl walked into the bright light of the living room, Phil noticed that his pupils contracted to pinpoints. When Carl sniffed several times and blew his nose before getting his jacket off, Phil said to himself, "Cocaine again." Carl sprawled on the sofa and asked if Phil had something to lace the coffee with.

"Sorry, you know I can't keep that stuff around. It's just too tempting."

Carl nodded, pretending to understand. He didn't really see what harm an occasional drink would do. After a few moments, Carl told Phil his story.

Carl had driven home that evening in the pouring rain. Traffic was creeping along. His exit was only two more ahead, but it was already 6:45. He had promised Stacey that he would be home *for sure* no later than 6:30. He knew that the concert didn't start until 8:30, but she didn't. He often told her an earlier starting time for events so she would be ready. She was probably still "napping," and the dog surely hadn't been walked.

Phil nodded, seeing Carl's lying as a need to manipulate reality to make it more palpable.

Carl continued to relate his experience as though it was happening in the moment. "I'll get home by seven, nuke something to eat, and clean up after the dog before I wake Stacey. I can tell her that she was

sleeping so well that I just let her sleep after I discovered I'd made a mistake on the time for the concert. I'll put the food in front of her, and maybe she'll eat. If I tell her I really want her to wear the lavender dress because it goes with my tie, she won't dither about what to wear. . . ."

Phil experienced a sinking feeling as he listened to Carl's ever more elaborate plans—while he was still stalled on the freeway. Phil knew that Carl was trying to cover up for both himself and Stacey.

Carl described the two fender-benders on the other side of the road that distracted him briefly. When the dashboard clock said 7:04, and the exit was still more than four miles away, he again revamped the plans. Ten minutes later, however, he had to come up with something else when the van a few cars ahead started belching black smoke and stopped in the middle of both of the two right-hand lanes.

Inwardly, Phil admired his brother's creativity, but saw how he was wasting it and his energy on something over which he had no control.

By 7:55, Carl knew making the concert on time was out of the question. By 8:10, with his exit in sight, he was exhausted, hungry, angry, and had a pounding headache.

Phil recognized the warning triggers for an intensified temptation to use addictive processes or behaviors. Phil thought about the acronym *HALT*, "Don't get too *H*ungry, *A*ngry, *L*onely, or *T*ired." He knew that he was always at greater risk for relapsing into old patterns when he didn't follow that simple advice.

"Why am I doing this?" Carl asked. He answered his own question with considerable anger. "To keep up the house payments. To help Stacey. To take care of the dog. To pay back the loans. To take a vacation to finally get away from the pressure."

Carl talked about his fantasy that if he kept on driving into the night he could be free. Getting away would solve all his problems. He would start over in a different city, be responsible only for himself. He'd change his name and never be in touch with anyone he knew ever again. He knew he couldn't and wouldn't go that far, yet the impulse was strong.

Phil hoped it was a long-silent part of Carl beginning to speak, recognizing that something really was wrong with his life and that he didn't know how to fix it. He was also scared that Carl's desire to escape this could lead to suicidal thoughts as a way to solve problems.

Something like that had almost happened tonight. Carl described in

detail how he finally pulled into his garage and punched the button to close the door. He turned off the engine and rested his head on the steering wheel. He listened to the bells of the little dream catcher on the rearview mirror. He couldn't seem to get himself together or muster the energy to even care. The car's heater had quit working what seemed like hours ago. As the overhead door clanged shut, he considered turning on the car again to see if the engine would generate a little heat; then he could simply sit without having to *do* anything.

As he reached for the ignition, suddenly he felt a gut-clenching fear. The part of him that had awakened a bit earlier seemed to scream, "No! Don't kill me!" Snapped into a mental state of absolute clarity, he realized that a running engine in a closed space would generate carbon monoxide and would indeed eventually kill him.

That had scared him a lot. Phil was surprised that Carl had talked this much and revealed what was really going on inside. Phil was relieved that Carl had so firmly rejected suicide as a solution.

The more Phil reflected on the conversation, the more he could see that Carl believed every nuance of his life was worthy of note. Now it made sense to Phil. One of the common characteristics of someone with an addiction problem was incredible self-centeredness. What Phil had been listening to was a monologue all about Carl.

Step One Questions

Beginning the process of twelve-step recovery is difficult. This exercise is a way to start, to answer some questions designed to help you discover more about yourself.

In the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* at the end of this book, you will find a copy of these questions. You may find them helpful in assessing whether you are harming yourself or others. In taking Step One, many of us find that we not only expect higher standards of ourselves than we expect of others, but at the same time excuse ourselves for harm that we have caused. By doing both—which are logically not compatible—we can switch between them and never make a clear choice or take responsibility for ourselves.

One of the most difficult things for us to identify is harm we do to ourselves. We have this idea that we are, or should be, stronger, better, braver, more patient, and more able than most other folks. We don't

say these things in pride. We say them to our internal selves as both a justification for our own guilt and a way to spur ourselves on to do just a little bit more.

If we reflect carefully, we might be appalled at the notion of talking to someone else the way we speak to ourselves. Can you imagine saying this to someone you love? "Your problem is that you just don't try hard enough. You are the wrong body size and shape. You expect to do more than everyone else, and it doesn't matter what they think, want, feel, or need."

We say other nasty things to ourselves as well. Because so much of this chatter goes on in our heads, we find it easier to see the harm we do to others. After all, we *should* be above all that. On the other hand, we make excuses for ourselves and minimize the harm to others.

Part of twelve-step recovery is developing a practical ethical system that distinguishes between the hurt and harm. Hurt is more temporary than harm. A child might protest mightily at not being permitted to watch videos until midnight. The responsible adult is simply preventing harm by allowing some hurt. Some cases like this are simple and clear. Another example: Having regular professional dental checkups and following proper dental hygiene may cause some temporary discomfort, but good oral habits prevent a host of later problems.

The Step One questions ask about areas that are truly harmful, though they may also be hurtful. The Tarot spread offers an opportunity to gain a new perspective on the hurt/harm question.

Taking Step One

An interesting part of working the steps is that they have to be done over and over again. It is not as hard to believe something in our heads—like our lives are overwhelming—as it is to believe it in our hearts. To believe with the core of our being is undoubtedly difficult, and applying these beliefs to our lives is even harder.

Some people like to literally write out their thoughts and feelings about Step One, and make a statement that they do indeed "take" the step. Others may make records in other ways. It is not necessary to "take" the step in a certain way, but it is necessary to take it. Taking Step One can be something that happens more than once. It simply seems to work best when it happens first.

I have found it most helpful to mark the occasion in some way. One simple and effective marker is to create a sacred space, reflect a few moments on Step One as it applies to you, and then empower a special holder and light a candle to signify your intention to walk in the light of your new realization. When you want to strengthen your new path, light a candle in the holder as a reminder. The full text of this ritual is found in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* at the end of this book.

Step Two

Once I admitted that my life was truly overwhelming, I wanted to figure out what I could do to *fix it! Now!* I was looking for a "magic bullet," something that would once and for all solve my problems. It took me a while to recognize that recovery is cyclical, continuous, and spiral.

My version of Step Two states:

> *Came to believe that a power within ourselves and our world could restore us to balance.*

I've spent a lot of time and energy trying to convince myself that what I've done or failed to do really doesn't harm anyone and that no one could possibly understand or help anyway. I have a deep emotional investment in being right, and that means that I've considered all the options. The notion that there *is* something available to me, internally and externally, doesn't affirm this rather narrow point of view. My life has had less to do with balance than with making sure my rather rickety lifeboat doesn't capsize several times a day!

The notion of "coming to believe" always seemed so simple to me. Either I did believe, or I didn't. I had not understood and experienced it as a process. I had a great deal of suspicion regarding the idea of belief because it seemed too deeply linked to dogma, rigidity, and authoritarianism. I had the idea that if I believed one thing, it meant I had to believe all the things that our society, my family, and others believed as well. I had no interest in that.

My quest for spiritual reality, within the context of both my Pagan beliefs and my recovery from addictions, led me to continue my education. When I was in seminary (and yes, it was both Christian and help-

ful), the instructors introduced an idea that, with some Pagan twists, proved helpful in wrestling with this step.

Belief is a complex thing and is a foundation of vital spirituality. This kind of spirituality contains at least five elements. The Christian Calvinist theologians would agree with at least the first three. (I also suspect they would spin in their graves at the way I use their thoughts!)

• *First, there must be content.* (The Latin is *notitia.*) Books, lectures, meetings, and discussions are about content. This includes the perspectives, experiences, traditions, thoughts, and gifts given to us through our world. In a Wiccan circle, this corresponds to the area of the north.

• *Second, there must be agreement.* (The Latin is *assensus.*) We consider the content we gathered. We hold it up to our experience and our ability to reason logically. Then we run it by our own internal compass. We may take some aspects of the content and affirm them. Other parts might be left behind or put aside for the time. We might change some things to suit ourselves. This is the essence of our internal intellectual work. This is why we read, work with others, and research things of interest to us. This corresponds to the east.

• *Third, there must be living faith.* (The Latin is *fides vitae.*) This is what changes our beings—the passion, the soul's stirring that hunts wild in our blood, sings in the silent caverns of memory, carries us on an unexpected wave of bliss, and challenges us to pull down our defenses. This is what drives us, what inspires us. We have an intuitive sense when words are just words and not followed up by this type of living faith. This choice of our wills, backed with our personal power, corresponds to the south.

• *Fourth, there must be activity.* Once the life is stirred, once the vision of radical freedom takes hold, to turn back is to lose our very soul. The Calvinists would say that those in whom the Spirit resides cannot be other than what they are. Pagans would say that we are part of our everyday world. We live our visions and our truths as an ongoing part of our service and our ethic. The west has to do with relationships and emotions, and this idea touches them both.

• *Fifth, we need a balanced connection.* We are not alone, and we do not live or die alone. We may feel alone at times, yet the Divine is always available to those who seek. Our lives are intertwined with those of others, whether we are aware it is so or not. As Pagans, we affirm the

cycles of life and death, of birth and growth and decay and death and rebirth. Our belief, our faith, is inexorably tied to this perception of spirit, the center.

Elaine's Story

Elaine kept thinking back to her Step One Tarot reading, and especially the reversed Page of Cups as the time card. She had very little trouble seeing her own problems with being overwhelmed. She easily focused on other people's demands on her time and decided that she was going to draw some boundaries around her own time.

Over the next couple of weeks, Elaine made out a lovely schedule that included family time and personal time for each of the four of them. She consulted with Sandy, who liked the idea of having some time that didn't have to be accounted for. The kids didn't seem very impressed, but Elaine decided to start the new schedule the following Monday anyway.

Naturally, that week Elaine had to work late, both kids got sick, and Sandy was feeling depressed. So they tried again the following Monday. It worked for a few days; then the old patterns reasserted themselves. No one in the family seemed to care about the program, though they all said they agreed Elaine should take some time for herself. Elaine became more and more frustrated. The more frustrated she got, the harder she tried to make the program work.

"Why me?" she moaned at the next Saturday meeting. She listened to others in the group who had been struggling with similar things and began to realize something. She had assumed that since she now knew what the problem was, she should somehow be able to fix it. Over the next few meetings Elaine began to see that knowledge and schedules were not enough. Trying to control others, even if they seemed to want or need it, was not the answer.

She considered the chemically addicted people in the meeting who thought that they could use "moderately." One of the longtime members had put it very well. "Don't put the chemical in your body, and you won't have the chemical in your body." This matched with Elaine's experience, and with the decision she and Sandy had made not to drink even socially.

If Elaine really believed her life was overwhelming, that she was

harming herself and others, why did she continue to use the same old coping behaviors? Other than obvious physiological differences, was she really any different from those who had a clear physical addiction?

By this time, Elaine had enlisted Camilla as her sponsor, and Camilla was willing to ask hard questions. Together, they went through Elaine's Step One Tarot spread, and cast the next four cards for Step Two (see *Recovery Sprial Tarot Manual*).

The 7 of Cups, which pictures a person trying to make a choice between way too many options, represented the belief that imagination and fantasy without action are enough. Elaine saw that she believed in her daydreams or wishes to the exclusion of reality.

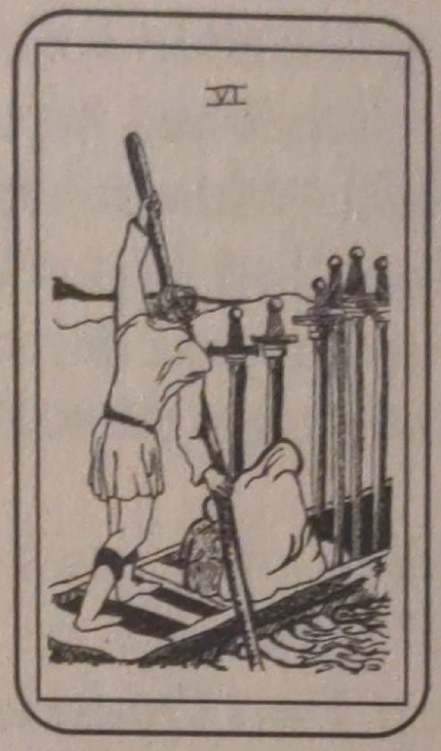
The reversed Knight of Pentacles in the position of power was interesting. Upright, it would have indicated the power to do a good job (something Elaine prided herself on), to cooperate, and to face problems. Upside down indicated that her power was being squandered in confusion, avoidance, and fantasy. Reversed, the Knight of Pentacles is sometimes called the "loner" card. Elaine was certainly feeling alone with her problems.

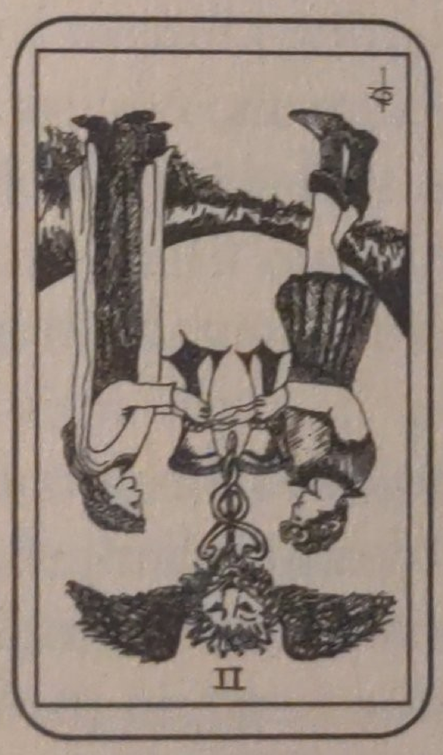
A reversed Moon, indicating the ability to use intuition wisely, was the third card. This card seemed to say that her addiction to helping people was blocking her intuition; it also indicated that there was power in her world to balance her common sense and her creativity. This seemed to tell her that she was not alone—help was available.

The fourth card, the King of Cups, surprised Elaine. She just didn't see why the image of a kindly, understanding, and sensitive person was in the outcome position. Camilla knew that this card would become the image of the Divine that Elaine would have to confront in the next step's reading. She told Elaine how the card would be used in Step Three, and she suggested that Elaine spend some time with this image, and perhaps do some meditation.

Elaine understood clearly the first three cards in the reading and how they applied to her. Coupled with the reversed Page of Cups in the timing position, Elaine saw that hiding her true emotions made it more difficult for her to take direct and timely action. She set the fourth card aside for a while.

When Elaine got home, she began making some changes based on her Step Two reading. She realized that her fantasy about being a "good mother" was a problem. Still thinking about time, her first practical





ELAINE'S STEP TWO READING

change was to go through the boxes that still hadn't been unpacked since moving and find two unused alarm clocks.

Elaine realized that she liked being the one to awaken her children, but loathed the stress it caused. When she was growing up, her family had left for their working and school days before she awoke. She hated getting up to an empty house, and she had promised herself her children would never have to go through that. Instead, she awakened Sandy, who worked second shift, to be with the kids in the ten minutes between when Elaine had to leave for work and when their bus came. Elaine realized now that *her* needs had kept the kids, and Sandy, from practicing a basic living skill. Without really knowing that she was working on Step Two, Elaine had begun to believe that a power in herself (in this case the power to make decisions for her own good) and her world (the family's power to get themselves up) could indeed help restore her to balance.

Step Two Questions

The Step Two questions are designed to uncover some basic beliefs. This is a continuing process, not a one-time thing. I've had to re-answer those questions every time I've gotten stuck. I tend to notice my problem when I blithely agree that I am harming myself or others, but nothing changes.

Even though I think I'm pretty bright, I am aware that logic and mental gymnastics are not all I need to make changes. I somehow lose the connection between "this is a problem" and "I need to clean up my side of the street." My personal favorite is to put the blame on others for my shortcomings. Unfortunately, I've also noticed that the things I dislike in other people are the things that I despise, feel guilty about, or wish to change in myself. We will spend more time on this in Step Ten, where we encounter the Wraith of Self-Harm.

For example, if I find myself sniffing self-righteously at someone for being less than ethical, it's probably time for me to look at how I'm practicing my ethics. If I'm feeling used or put-upon, I'm probably acting out the belief that my time, energy, or resources are not as important as my partner's. Part of recovery is being responsible for my own stuff, emotional baggage and all. I am better with that when I understand *what* the baggage is, *where* it comes from, and *how* I can change it.

Phil's Story

Phil was waiting for Carl to blame someone else for his problems. It's what addicts do. He knew because he himself did it all the time. Their mom and dad had made a virtue out of contending for the position of "most distressed." Just last night Phil had blamed Megan for his problems with getting a date.

Carl was still describing his evening. Realizing he had almost killed himself, he was shocked. How had he gotten into this mess? Stacey! It was her fault. He went into the house, full of rage. All his fear, all his resentment, all his frustration focused on his wife.

He charged into the house, yelling, "Stacey, you drunk, get the hell out of bed!"

"What are you high on this time and why are you so late?" she called through the bathroom door.

They both shouted and stomped and squalled with equal vigor. The dog got upset and was sick on the carpet. The fight went on, and the concert was forgotten.

That's how Carl wound up three blocks away, spending the night on Phil's sofa. Carl ran out of steam as he was describing how terribly Stacey had treated him. He fell asleep in the time it took Phil to get another cup of coffee. Phil hoped this was a turning point for Carl. He put a blanket over Carl, turned out the light, and went to bed.

Saturday noontime saw Carl walking back from an uncomfortable night. The distance from one house to the other seemed like miles. He rang the bell. Stacey had chained the front door. She let him in, and she made a peace offering of freshly brewed hazelnut coffee. They faced one another, sitting on opposite sides of the room.

"What happened?" Carl asked.

Stacey didn't reply at once. "What set you off?"

A little uneasy laughter didn't reduce the tension much. Stacey began to talk, though she looked at her mug and not at Carl.

"I had only a little wine to keep me from being too stressed. I was really worried about you. I pictured you dead in that damned car you love so much."

"I just got stuck in traffic. What's the big deal?" replied Carl.

Again, Stacey and Carl began picking at each other. The doorbell sounded, and they ignored it, too caught up in their own difficulties. After the third impatient ring, the dog began to bark in earnest.

"I'll answer it, and whoever is there will be sorry for hanging on that bell," said Carl.

It was Phil. "I just came to ask if you two would like to talk about last night."

"No," said Carl. At the same time, Stacey said, "Yes!"

Carl yanked Phil inside, slammed the door, and stormed up the steps to the living room. "You might as well come in. You know what happened."

After a few false starts, the three of them talked for the rest of the afternoon about the problems that had become so evident. By dark, Stacey was ready to ask for some help to get out of her cycles of drinking, depression, and anger. She was desperate.

Phil mentioned a group of people who met to talk about recovery from these cycles. He had actually met these Pagans through another woman he had been dating. He had found he liked the openness of the group, and he had become interested in some of the religious aspects. Phil was particularly intrigued at first by the friendliness of the women, and the idea that sex was a good thing. He had come to believe that he was harming himself and others by always seeking romantic relationships to assure him that he was worthwhile. He had begun to explore, and then question, his own motives for becoming involved with a group who did view sexuality in a positive way. Recently, he had begun to see the distinctions among healthy sex, love, and his own addictive patterns.

He didn't mention the specifics, thinking it might be a bit too much. Did Stacey want to go to a meeting tonight? Her enthusiastic nod was clear.

Carl decided to go too. He asked a couple of questions about the group, and discovered they were doing twelve-step work. Then he wanted nothing to do with these "do-gooders."

Carl believed the problems between him and Stacey were just temporary. Things had to get better soon. Stacey could get a real job and get out of the house, away from the temptations of her lazy friends who had nothing better to do than drink all day.

Carl didn't mind Stacey getting some help in the meantime, but he knew his brother's way with women. He offered to drive her and Phil to the meeting and take them out to dinner afterward. He could use the time that they were in the meeting to catch up on his reading.

Stacey agreed and went to change out of her bathrobe. Phil studied his older brother carefully.

"Do you really think the problem is just with Stacey?" asked Phil.

"Well, yes and no. She needs to have something to keep her busy. It'll keep her from drinking all day. I had more time to use coke until I got this job. I don't do much coke, and never at work, but it does take the edge off. It's not like the problem that Stacey has," replied Carl.

Phil shrugged. He'd done all he could do right now. As long as Carl believed that he could handle things by himself, he wouldn't be really ready to make the changes and do the work it would take.

Phil remembered how bad things had gotten in his own life not that long ago. He had lost his car, job, and self-respect. That was when he stopped using hard drugs. Several months later, alcohol seemed to be the real problem, so he quit drinking. Over almost two years, he also gave up gambling and pot. Things kept getting worse and worse.

Finally, someone had asked him what he really believed about himself. That stopped him cold. He didn't know. He was simply reacting to pressures. It didn't seem to matter whether the pressures were helpful or harmful in his life, whether they were internal or external. Phil began investigating the peer support groups because he had no insurance and these groups were basically free. It took some time, but he began to settle down to working a twelve-step program. He continued to feel empty, like he was missing something.

In financial despair, he had decided he needed only one good win at the track to get things right. A few months later, he showed up at the first meeting he could find. He was a wreck. He blamed his own luck, family, girlfriends, parents, and education. An old-timer took him aside after the meeting and offered him a meal and a place to stay. Phil for the first time gratefully accepted an offer of help.

In less than a year, he had begun to have that spiritual awakening he'd heard so much talk about. He had come to believe that he was not alone, that his experiences and feelings did matter, and that he could still help himself. He had reestablished his career, started to pay off his debts, and rented a small house in a pleasant, peaceful neighborhood. He realized that he had lost a lot, and he didn't want to see Carl or Stacey in the same predicament.

Phil understood Carl's reservations about do-gooders. Their parents had been oh-so-proper and done lots of nice stuff to help people. At

home, however, things were different. A huge abyss existed between what the parents said and did to others, and what they said and did to each other and the kids.

He knew that he and Carl had both struggled with what was inside and what was being reflected on the outside. He had tried to resolve a lot of his own internal conflict by placing a number of substance and process addictions between himself and reality. He knew it had failed. He was pretty sure he saw Carl's behavior going the same way.

Phil understood how difficult it could be to establish open and honest connection with oneself, let alone another person. He understood that Carl was struggling with that, even as Stacey was.

His own struggles with Step One as it applied to his romantic relationships were still fresh in his mind. It took him a while to realize that he really didn't care about the women he dated, often seeing several at once and lying about it. He would get out of most relationships if he thought they were getting "too serious," which for him meant the woman was beginning to ask too many questions about the rest of his life. He liked being the charming and mysterious man-about-town. In Step One, he realized that when he didn't have one, or several, women in his life he was miserable, almost unable to do his job because he focused on his desires for sexual companionship and the validation of a woman's regard.

Phil's Step Two ritual had helped him understand that he needed to learn to be with himself. He needed to know and like the person he was, not to get his sense of worth from others. He had been struggling with learning to have genuine friendships that were not always about the bedroom, or about bragging.

Taking Step Two

The purpose in taking Step Two is to discover our beliefs, something about our personal power and the power in the worlds around us. The meditative exercise for Step Two in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* seeks to show a way to ground, center, and access our inner circle. This helps us establish the connection we will need.

Most of us have a great deal of trouble simply being ourselves and being in the world. We have not learned the skills we need. We are somehow afraid to spend time alone without something to distract us.

We have gotten used to being in constant crisis, and we have come to at least understand how that works.

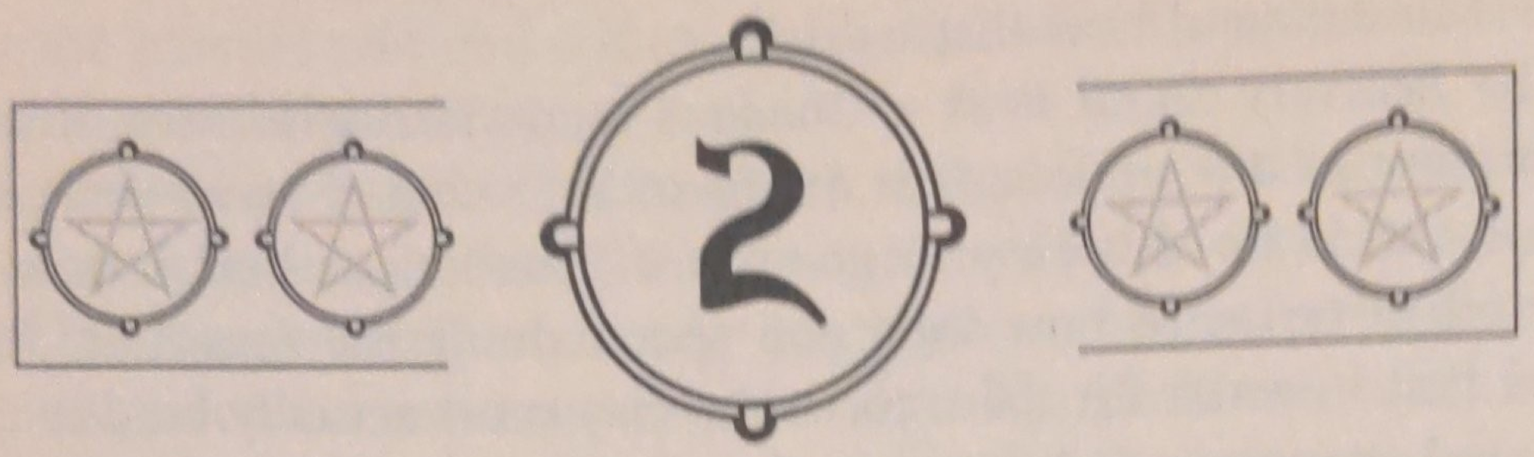
The *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* recommends a form of active meditation as one option. Our minds tend to chatter away if we don't have tasks to do. It's easy to give up in frustration. Feel free to suit yourself in terms of how long you spend doing the exercises. Please know that in order for them to work, they must actually be done, not just read or understood.

We often find the seductiveness of old addictive patterns is more comfortable than the new beginning that we are establishing. It would be much easier to take a nap—and call it taking care of the body—than to actually make some personal time and space. It is familiar to attend to someone's immediate need rather than take our own needs seriously. Be aware that we may have to make several attempts before we even begin to feel like we are accomplishing anything. In our addictions, we were so focused on relieving the pressure and pain instantly that we did not have the patience or wisdom to practice. We thought we had to be right and perfect all the time.

There is nothing wrong with doing an exercise several times. This is a spiral, not a straight line. After doing the initial exercises, it is easier to be in touch with our centers. This is a key to accessing our spirituality.

When I was actually writing the rituals, I made up index cards to cue me what came next. I've done ritual for almost thirty years, but I found I needed the written reminders to keep me on track and focused. As I have done the rituals more, I've become less dependent on the cards. But I'm glad to know I have them there if I need them.

To be a true equal in our minds, wills, hearts, bodies, and spirits is an ongoing process. Steps One and Two give us some of the tools of reflection that are a vital part of the path. For better or worse, they are the foundation, and they actually do come first and second.



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CHOOSING HOPE:

The Principle of Consensus

Steps Three and Four, and Step Five—Transition

Addictions blur our boundaries. We have a hard time telling ourselves from the addiction or its effects. When we are in active addiction, we cannot take the vital step of relating to others in a healthy way. To recover, we need to take the time and energy to consider ourselves carefully. In Steps Three, Four, and Five, we look deeply into ourselves and our pasts to discover what is Divine Presence for us. Additionally, we look at the ways we have related to others. One element of a healthy relationship is consensus.

To honor the South, the place of choices and will, we choose our path together in *consensus*. In a relationship, this means that partners must both agree on choices that are for both. In Step Three, our partner is the Divine. When we acknowledge a Divine Presence, we need to begin the process of working and choosing together with that Divine Presence. We commit to discussing and wrestling with our wants, needs, hopes, fears, money, power, and sexuality. We don't carry hidden agendas, nor do we try to manipulate one another. If we are not both okay with something, we continue to work on it until we are. This becomes easier when we have established a solid ground for ourselves, a personal center from which we can consider our own and other's actions.

Step Three is about direct choice about that Divine Presence. It says,

Made a decision to move our will and our lives toward that Divine Presence.

For a decision as important as this one, we need to consider very carefully what we believe about the Divine Presence. An important aspect is to make a distinction between what we have been told to believe, or what we think is the acceptable thing to believe, and what we truly believe. We try to understand at least in part how those beliefs have affected, and will continue to affect, our will and our lives. Thus Step Three helps us look deeply into ourselves, which then becomes the foundation for more grounded and healthy relationships with others.

When we realize that our addictions have run our lives, we find ourselves understandably wary of any kind of control. In the past, be may have seen ourselves or others replace a "substance addiction"—alcohol, drugs, sugar—with a "process addiction" to work, sex, or even religion. The process of placing anything between our reality and us—even something as potentially helpful to us as religion—is still an addiction.

Some addictions may result in more immediate physical harm to others. Causing a traffic death while driving stoned is a simple example. Other addictions, such as taking care of people at the expense of ourselves, are not as obviously or immediately harmful. Shopping may seem rather harmless, except to our budget. When it is used addictively, its effect is to kill us spiritually by filling our world with manufactured things instead of our real selves. We may try to equate the value of the things we have with the value of ourselves. Religion may seem beneficial, but without a living faith, it is only one more buffer between ourselves and reality.

One of the sad facts about addiction is that when left to run its course, it *will* result in death, both spiritual and physical. By continuing our addictions, we are committing slow, but very sure, suicide.

Depending on our particular addictions, and the addictions of those around us, we may find it more comfortable to relate to the Divine in specific images or aspects. Some people may find themselves spontaneously interacting with a Divine Presence that takes the form of an authority figure. If we are taking care of others, we may be closest to this Parent or Guardian aspect of the Divine. In a moment of wonder or

rebellion, or if we use drugs, alcohol, sugar, or other ingested substances, we may find ourselves interacting with the Child or Seeker aspect. If we prefer to see the Divine as a responsible, but possibly wiser colleague, or if we are work addicts, the Adult or Guide part of the Divine may beckon us.

This triple division of roles—Parent, Child, and Adult—comes out of Eric Berne's psychological theory of transactional analysis. I have renamed these divisions as Guardian, Guide, and Seeker. The words—*parent, child,* and *adult*—are loaded with a power-over dynamic and a sense of judgment that I want to avoid in discussing this step. I use these roles as a way to look at the Goddess or the God, without having to stumble over the roadblock of family dynamics. I believe each of the three is very important to the functioning of a healthy self, no matter what our physical age or circumstances—as well as healthy relationships with the Divine and with others. I looked for more neutral words that would allow us to deepen and expand the ways we relate.

I have further divided each of the three roles into three aspects. The following chart outlines a ninefold path relating to the Divine Presence. These aspects can help us understand the Divine in many ways. Perhaps by seeing them with different faces, or names, we can progress along the spiral path of recovery. First we will talk about power, divinity, and authority. Then we will go into greater depth about each of the nine aspects. This chart allows us to see how the Guardian, Seeker, and Guide ideas fit together.

Guardian/Parent	Seeker/Child	Guide/Adult
Accepting	Adventurous	Literal
Structuring	Social	Abstract
Considerate	Natural	Integrative

Words About God

Two people were discussing religion and one said, "I just love to talk about theology." The second person replied "Oh, I'm not interested in theology. I just like to talk about the gods." Theology and talk about the gods are really the same thing. The truth is that we are all theolo-

gians, from the agnostic who claims there may or may not be a God to the fundamentalist who claims that God is in his or her own little box. This kind of god is a very specific being, with a list of explicit expectations and an uncompromising view on human behavior. The only real question is whether we will be thoughtful or careless theologians.

When we are active in our addictions, we love to argue. We have a fine time discounting anything we don't like because it's "not logical." Our addictions put up a type of spiritual blockade that prevent us from making decisions with the best information available to us.

The word *theology* comes from two Greek words: *theo*, meaning "God" and *logos*, meaning "word." Thus, theology is words about God—and the Greek implies "words about a masculine God." Sometimes I use the word *thealogy*, or "words about a feminine God." This may encourage us to look carefully at our beliefs and perhaps to move away from stereotypes.

For me, the word *theology* conjures up a stereotype of crusty scholars in musty Renaissance costumes sitting in a dusty room spouting obscure profundities at one another. A second stereotype is a teacher, Ms. Pedantic, wielding a red pencil to correct a misspelling and deduct one point, worshiping the dictionary as Divine and missing the larger idea altogether.

As Pagans, we don't care for either image. We do not like the idea of other people making decisions and rules for our lives or our goddesses or gods. We prefer to choose our own standards, as well as our own images for the Divine. Our addictions have helped us deal with the pain and frustration of being "told" what to do or how to believe. We may come slowly to the notion that we can take responsibility and make choices for ourselves. One of our most basic choices is how we view the Divine. Here are some things to think about as we consider how Step Three asks us to make that choice.

Sallie McFague, in her book *Metaphorical Theology* (1982), points out that we need to be very careful when we choose images for God, because such images quickly become either irrelevant or idolatrous. Because of the addictive fog in our lives, we tend to be people of extremes, and extreme metaphors. A metaphor is something that stands for something else, not the thing itself. Your eyes may be like deep pools in that they are beautiful, reflective, and indicate great depth—but don't rely on them as a primary water source in the desert. Later in this section

are examples of ways we allow our dependence on addictive substances or processes to obscure reality.

The idea of the Divine as, say, a pregnant horse is not very inspiring to most of us urban Pagans in this millennium. We are far removed from the time when a healthy, fertile animal made the difference between life and death. In other times and cultures, however, to see the Divine as the one who gives life was a very respectful and relevant image. The larger image of Macha as the goddess of land and life is still relevant, but we may image her in a different way.

We harm ourselves by acting and understanding in ways that no longer serve us. Images of the Divine from our pasts can hold us back from recovery, just as old ways of reacting are no longer helpful. Addictions collapse our ability to seek creative and new ways to live our lives. We become overwhelmed and despair of ever finding a new path.

On the other hand, McFague warns us that any image can be overused to the point of idolatry. We begin to regard the metaphor, or image, as identical to the Divine. Most of us are familiar with what is called "The Lord's Prayer." The first two words are "Our Father." Some traditions have found great value in the image of God as Father, and many have received comfort and inspiration from the image. Over time, however, the image has become both the primary image for God and the standard for other images. Images of God as female are not compatible with God as Father. God cannot have a womb. The image is even more destructive because it has become *equated* with God. Somehow, if God is primarily Father, then aren't those who are fathers or capable of becoming fathers in some essential way much more like God, and thus better and more worthy than those who are not?

We often use our inability to meet some standard as an excuse to indulge our addictions. If I am convinced that I am not desirable, I may seek the chemical boost of adrenaline by flirting with the next ten people I see to cover up my uncomfortable feelings. If my image of the Divine is punitive or critical, I can go to extremes. I can drain my energy and time trying to make up for my lack, or console myself for my failure by watching TV for three days. This lets me prove that I am indeed unworthy, and thus I have an excuse to console myself again.

We Pagans in recovery try to avoid both pitfalls—irrelevance and idolatry. One of the ways that we do this is to use many images for the Goddess and the God.

One of our tasks in recovery is to discover what images or energies are worthy of our trust and devotion. We consider what we believe in and whether these images and metaphors help or harm us. We can see ourselves in the Guardian, Seeker, and Guide images, and thus we use them to focus on aspects of ourselves.

Types of Gods

In the wider culture today, many tend to give lip service to monotheism while being practical polytheists. If a god is something we worship, then certainly money, sex, and power are three gods whose services we attend regularly. For an addict, our substances or processes are our god. They demand our time, energy, and resources. This may take a while to become blatantly obvious, but it will occur eventually because of the nature of addiction. We focus on protecting our supply of chemicals, of people to take care of, of Internet access. And we will make our addiction into our god.

There are a number of traditional ways to describe the Divine. Next, I discuss some of these ways and try to point out how we use these concepts to justify going back to our addiction.

One basic idea is that God is the being with the attribute of *asceity*, which means that God is the being that is not created by, dependent on, or derived from another being. That's nice. Unfortunately, that tends to make God a being somewhat removed from the rest of creation.

It's also a very helpful image if we want to protect our supply. Because God is so distant, and yet so perfect, we can never get close to the Divine or receive help with our problems. If we can't do these things, we need to console ourselves. And what better way than with our process or our drug of choice?

Some of those who accept this notion of what I call the "Omni-everything God" solved the problem of distance by coming up with a monotheism that is actually a "three for the price of one" deal. In this scheme, there is only one God, who contains three aspects. This way we poor creatures have at least a chance of being personal with God because one of the aspects (the Holy Spirit) is present in our world. Another aspect (Jesus) actually lived here like us for a while, and "understands" our plight. In a sense, the most removed aspect of God, or the Father, is still Omni-everything. The middle aspect, Jesus, stands

between the Father and us poor creatures, helping us by being a rather mature Guide. The Spirit is playful, and in some ways more nurturing. Any problems in logic or with our experience are simply a spiritual mystery.

Addicts often find that this system works for them. Comforting beliefs, like a being who can mediate between the punishing parent-god and us punishment-deserving people, are helpful in alleviating our sense of guilt for our active addictions.

Many Pagans reject this system in favor of polytheism, the notion that there are many gods. Gods and goddesses are larger than life. They are stronger, smarter, sexier, fatter, thinner, meaner, more powerful, and more drunk than we mortals. Think for a moment about the Greek or the Norse pantheon. Today, we do this same kind of image-making through the media. Celebrities are all bigger than life. This is a helpful notion for us addicts because we can point to a someone, whether it is Thor or the latest bad-boy rock star, who is worse or more extreme than we are. We are not the bottom of the cosmic barrel. We can feel a rather contorted version of superiority, which will act as a buffer between ourselves and our truth.

Some Pagans are also drawn to *henotheism*, the idea that a god is attached to a specific place. Thus if you live in Canada, you might worship Dudley Do-Right. If you live in Argentina, you might worship Evita. In Cincinnati, you might worship Procter & Gamble. In a bar, you might worship "Alcoholia." In a mall, you might worship "Spendit." And so on. This idea can help us offload our responsibility for our own actions because we can blame the place or the time in which we live. Thus we can console ourselves, and stay connected to our addictions.

Pantheism means that everything, from tomato worms to the people next door, is God. Robert Heinlein's book, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), has characters who greet each other with the phrase "Thou art God." If I am God, too, then what I do must be divinely inspired. If it's divinely inspired then it must be a good thing, so why am I bothering to do this recovery work?

Some Pagans, including me, are *pan-en-theists*. I believe the Divine is *in* everything, but *not the same as* everything. As an artist and a visual thinker, I like using lots of images. If I am not careful, the images I choose can encourage me to use my chemicals or processes with Divine approval. For instance, if I focus on some aspects of Aphrodite, I can

find myself being careless about choosing safe and appropriate sexuality.

There are many goddesses and gods and other Divine Beings honored in Paganism. We Pagans are free to choose from any pantheon, or to recognize the Divine in whatever way we choose. When we choose to study or honor a pantheon, or make up our own, we also become aware of the people and the culture from which it originated. Often a historical pantheon will commend itself to our particular attention because we are in some way experiencing what that culture did. A strong need to honor the dead might draw us to the Egyptian gods and goddesses. A sense of connection with nature might lead to Celtic deities. Women's issues might evoke strong goddesses like Artemis, Minerva, or Baubo.

Having said this, there seem to be some common threads in Pagans' divine imaging. The "Triple Goddess" and her Consort are a frequent theme. The idea seems to have emerged from the cycles of life—childhood, followed by physical maturity, and then aging and death. We recognize the basic triple Goddess of Maiden (she who belongs to no one but herself), Mother (she who nurtures), and Crone (she who holds her wise blood within).

The partner, or consort, is friend and companion, lover, and he who gives of himself to nourish his people. Some Pagans follow his story through the cycles, or wheel, of the year. Within the Wheel of the Year, which often begins with Samhain or Halloween, the God, or Consort, dies and spends a time in the Cauldron of Rebirth. At Yule, the Winter Solstice, the Sun Child is born. He grows and matures through Imbolc and Ostara, and at Beltane he emerges as the youth, who is full of creative urges and makes love with the Maiden. By Litha, Summer Solstice, he is in the fullness of his manhood and the Goddess is the fully ripe Mother who gives birth and life. At Lammas and Mabon, the God is the Sacrificed King, who is cut down and harvested, along with the grain, to give life to the people. The Crone oversees the death of the God and the year, and thus the Wheel of the Year turns again.

The cyclical nature of the Divine is reflected in other ways, from the Moon's phases to the natural world. Our bodies, male or female, partake in birth, growth, decay, and death. While not all Pagans practice the cycles of the Sacrificed King, they generally look to nature in all aspects for inspiration.

The Guardians

In Step Two, we come to believe that there is a power in our world and ourselves. As Pagans, we have some beliefs about power, divinity, and authority. Many of us have a tendency to challenge ideas about what authority means and how it functions in our lives. We tend to ask, "Who says?" and be skeptical about the answer. As a result, many of us have trouble relating to the image of the Divine as mother, father, or other authority figure.

Our ideas of Divinity, of power, of authority, of Goddess and God, are formed at least in part by those in our growing-up years who were responsible for us, and thus had power or authority over us. Whether these were biological parents, those who took care of us, or the people we obeyed, they influenced our perspective. The question of their influence can be especially difficult if any of those people had their own struggles with addiction. We learned from them to cope with uncomfortable feelings and situations by using processes or substances.

We often find that we may have intellectually or overtly rejected some or all aspects of our upbringing. Yet those things still exert an undeniable influence in our lives.

We often consider those authority figures as either good or bad. We easily confuse the meaning of those words. We often say a teacher is *nice* if the work and the expectations for the class are relatively easy. We call a teacher *mean* if we are expected to learn or do more. This simplistic thinking carries over into our ideas about the Divine.

Many Pagans overtly reject images of the Divine as either too-demanding or too-permissive deities. Yet our relationship to the Divine often mirrors our earliest notions, ones we thought we cast aside. When we use processes or substances to muffle the terrible things we say to ourselves, to soften the knowledge of our miserable self-esteem or to allow us to keep performing, it is clear that the too-demanding deities are still speaking. When we make excuses to use our addictions rather than facing reality, the too-permissive deities are given voice. Sometimes both of these speak with the same voice.

We can let these internalized deities take turns condemning or condoning us. We heed only the guilt-ridden admonitions of the Terrible Mother Goddess or the Vengeful Father God. Then we listen only to the gentle reassurances of the Good Mother Goddess or the Loving Father God.

The too-permissive or too-punitive parent-god image isn't helpful. Part of our recovery work is to come to know a deeper and fuller Divine Presence. This is the Presence toward which we choose to move our lives and our will.

When I relate to the parental or authority part of the Divine, I use the term *Guardian.* Aspects to the Guardians include the Accepting, Structuring, and Considerate.

- The Accepting Guardian loves and accepts whatever I do and whoever I am, with Divine understanding, loyalty, and patience.
- The Structuring Guardian is very decisive, very ethical and moral, able to draw strong boundaries.
- The Considerate Guardian encourages me so that I may grow in freedom, allows me to succeed, learn, fail, and try again.

At times and in certain circumstances I need each of the three aspects. For example, Step One suggests that we recognize that we are harming ourselves and others. The Structuring Guardian, perhaps as Juno or Thoth, helps me with Step One by cutting through my addictive fog, thereby drawing boundaries around the truth and holding my behavior up to the light of the Rede or ethic.

The Accepting Guardian, perhaps Kuan Yin or Osiris, helps me with Step Two by offering hope and love. Step Two affirms that we are not alone, that our experience matters, and that there are many sources of help. The Considerate Guardian, perhaps imaged as Ma'at or Arachne, brings the balance of Step Three into focus. Step Three helps us activate that hope.

The Seekers (Child)

When I relate to the child or young part of the Divine, I use the term *Seeker.* Aspects to the Seekers include the Adventurous, Social and Natural.

- The Adventurous Seeker is curious and somewhat rebellious. This part encourages me to explore and experiment, to be one with Divine foolishness. Here I find the power to make my own decisions and choices.

- The Social Seeker is very concerned with the effects of behavior. Here we find the striving for excellence, perfection, and the ability to stand out from the crowd. We also find the will to be connected.

- The Natural Seeker encourages me to experience my body, the present, my emotions, and my responses directly, rather than through the filter of another substance or process.

At times and in certain circumstances I need each of the three aspects.

In addictions, we fantasize that we do not have to go through the natural cycles. We imagine that we can experience the world and relationships in a very controlled, and thus more comfortable and predictable, way. We like the "window" of good feeling, which we associate with youth and carelessness. We are less fond of the notions of maturity, aging, and death.

We try to silence our consciousness with our addictions. We try to freeze our youth, or our good or familiar feelings, and recapture them through using substitutes. Even if our early feelings were not good, we may cling to them because at least they are familiar. We fear new feelings, growth, and change. We cannot see the possibilities of better ways of living and being.

We enjoy the idea of having a formula to get some emotional "heat" from our parent. If we perform in a particular way, we get approval, or at least attention. We may do well, or poorly, in school. We may try to please by conforming to a standard, or by hiding certain feelings. Many times part of the problem is that the messages we get as children are not consistent. For example, our caretakers may tell us that smoking is bad for us, yet they are seen smoking. We may experience emotional connection between our parents as they scream at one another. We may have a hard time separating anger and connection, and we may have been forbidden to express our own anger. We therefore have a hard time expressing emotional connection. Or, like our parents, we may scream every time we feel anger or connection.

Someone may encourage us to take music lessons; then we find that the piano is always out of tune. Our parents may scold us for poor grades in school by saying, "You're just like your grandfather," but confuse us when at other times they cite our grandfather as a good example.

How can someone who gets poor grades also be a good example? How can we be loyal to everybody? The answer is that it is not possible.

We like knowing that we are safe. We may be curious or push the limits because it is natural for us to do so. And we also like knowing that our parent/guardian will draw a boundary for us if we cannot draw it for ourselves.

In relation to the Divine, we may, at least overtly, reject the image of being the always-perfect or always-responsible worshiper. We give lip service to being fallible humans. Then we take this to the extremes of overindulgence or overvigilance. We spend our money before earning it, trusting that the Divine Credit Card has no limit. We abuse our bodies and assume that the Divine Healer will take care of any problems that arise. We say, "You can't stop me" to the Parental God.

We refuse to consider a trusting relationship because we have had a bad experience, and we view each person in our lives as a predator intent on robbing us of the small fund of Cosmic Caring available. We protect our fragile inner selves by either not feeling, or feeling, everything. Here we say, "You can't make me" to the Parental God.

Step One suggests that we recognize that we are harming ourselves and others. The Adventurous Seeker gives us the courage to step aside from our addictions and try new thoughts and behaviors, to imagine what life could be like without constantly being overwhelmed and colored by addictions, how we can live ethical behavior. Artemis and Coyote are examples of this type of Divine presence.

The Social Seeker, seen in Brigit or Horus, helps us with Step Two by showing us the effect of our behavior or addictions. The Natural Seeker, Persephone or Pan, allows us to take Step Three as a natural result of the first two.

There has been a great deal written about the "inner child," and about the Divine Child within. My reading of this literature indicates that both of these children are just that—children. The child is there to be encouraged or tolerated, to be healed or corrected. Like the Parent Divine who is somehow removed from our world, the "children" are removed from the present. We are grown up, after all. We may fear the Seeker in ourselves, equating this aspect with the powerless or too-responsible or abused child.

The difference between those children and the Seeker is that the Seeker is complete, valuable, and worthy. A child reacts, rather than

acts. In relating to the Seeker, we consider our emotions, bodies, and instinctual nature to be reflected in the aspect of the self and are enough. The Seeker is ethically responsible and powerful.

The Seeker can act, as well as react, and may initiate rather than simply receive.

The Guides (Adult)

When I relate to the adult or logical part of the Divine, I use the term *Guide*. Aspects to the Guides include the Literal, Abstract, and Integrative.

- The Literal Guide is extremely competent with things that can be weighted, counted, measured, or recorded.
- The Integrative Guide puts together information from the seen and unseen world, and comes to conclusions. There are times and circumstances when I need each of the three aspects.
- The Abstract Guide helps me with Step Two by validating what I intuitively sense and know. I do feel connections with others and with the world around me. Because these examples are not easily quantifiable, the assistance of the Abstract Guide helps me to believe them and to make sense out of my experience.

Working Step One successfully means I need to think clearly. The Literal Guide shows me how I am harming myself and others. I cannot pretend that things are not as they are. I can't say that this lie isn't really a lie. The Literal Guide can help when addictions at times make it impossible for me to see or understand things that are in front of me. When I know that I have no money in my checking account, and I am contemplating buying new furniture and writing a check for it today, I am practicing my addiction.

The Integrative Guide helps me put together my past and my present, my thinking and my feeling, my hopes and my fears. Here I discover that I can make choices in balance.

Addictions mean that we are not capable of regularly making decisions based on reality. Our perceptions, and thus our choices, are clouded. We may strive to compensate by being very, very logical. Of course, since the data we have taken in are flawed to begin with, our

choices are skewed. We may strive to shake off the pressures of the world and listen only to our inner voice. This voice is speaking through fog as well, impairing our ability to hear and the true spirit's ability to communicate.

We find it easier to make either/or decisions, ignoring the reality of processes in our lives. Dualistic or white-and-black thinking reduces the genuine complexity of our experience. Our view, and thus our conclusion, is distorted. Next, we will see how Elaine struggles with the idea that recovery is spiral, not linear.

Elaine's Story

Camilla, Elaine's sponsor, suggested that it was time to begin looking at the Divine Presence. Elaine responded that she had excellent relationships with her chosen deities. She had been a Wiccan priestess for more than seven years and had been initiated into a local coven. She had led her own study circle until time pressures made it necessary to hand off the responsibility to someone else. She still attended a few rituals and some of the closed coven workings. Yet, even with this history of religious involvement, Camilla continued to encourage Elaine to look at her own beliefs.

"Recovery is a spiral," Camilla said. To go into her issues on a deeper and broader basis, Elaine would have to visit her issues again and again. Experiences of spirituality might be significant, and very intense, even life changing. Living in recovery did not mean she had to abandon her prior experiences. It did mean being clear about her spiritual beliefs and practices here and now.

"Well, at least this step ought to be easy for me!" Elaine said hopefully.

Camilla took out the King of Cups, which had been the outcome card from Elaine's Step Two spread. (See the *Recovery Spiral Tarot Manual*.) In the Step Three reading, this card represented how her belief in herself and others was manifested. Elaine pulled nine more cards, laid out like a tic-tac-toe board reflecting the chart on page 197. They then turned face down all the cards that did not match in suit or number the King of Cups. In Elaine's reading this time, there were no Kings, and the only cups were the 4 and the 3.

ELAINE'S
STEP THREE
READING

The lack of upright cards in the Guide positions suggested that Elaine did not have a developed idea of the Divine as Guide. As structuring Guardian, the 4 of Cups indicated a sense that she could only choose one thing, and that emotional apathy or withdrawal were her ways of dealing with conflict. The 3 of Cups in the Natural Seeker position suggested that she sought only positive, successful emotions and responses. Together with the King of Cups, who is loving, trustworthy, and dependable, Elaine's picture of the Divine seemed extremely one-sided. How could such a Divine presence be reliable in dealing with the difficult conflicts and emotions that she was experiencing?

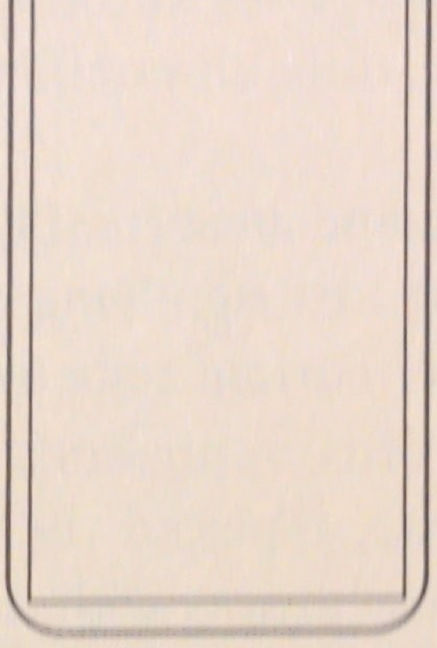
Looking for some answers, Elaine placed two more cards over each upright card, the first signifying a possibility and the second a method to move from her current state to another possibility.

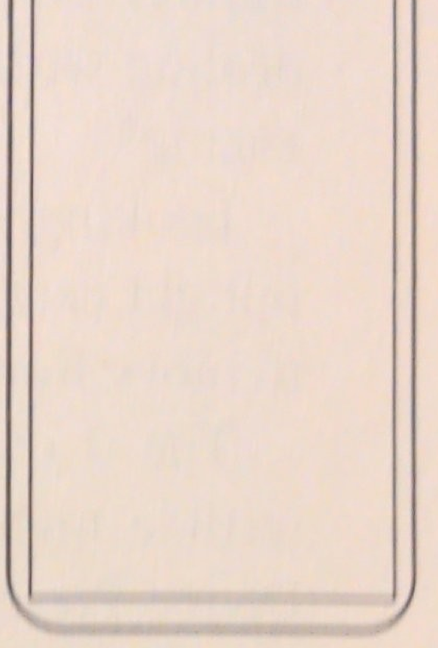
The 9 of Swords, representing the ability to wake up safe after a terrible nightmare, replaced the King. She liked the idea of having a Divine Presence who was with her in difficult times. The 8 of Swords indicated that she had to make the move to remove the blindfold of denial.

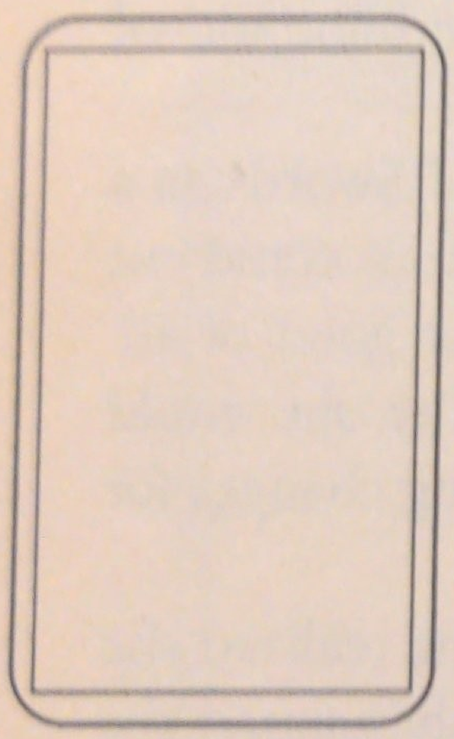
Encouraged, she covered the 4 of Cups. The Queen of Swords as a structuring Guardian was a very powerful image. This queen could cut through the fog and provide firm direction based on the good of all. The 7 of Swords told her that to move from one to the other, she would need to be aware of overconfidence and arrogance, making changes for herself first. But changes would have to be made.

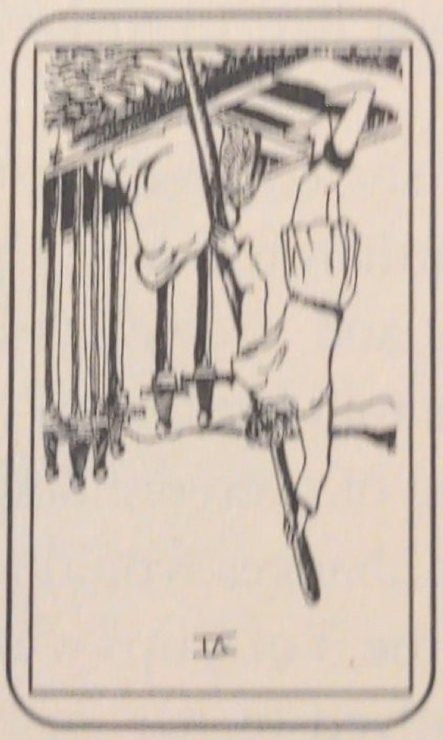
She covered the 3 of Cups with the Knight of Cups. She realized she was deeply involved in her emotional situation and truly wanted the Knight on the White Horse to come along and rescue her. Looking deeper, Elaine knew that she needed to be open to messages, especially about her partner. The message she needed to hear, represented by the reversed 9 of Wands, was that there was a tough road ahead. She needed to face that things were not as she wished them to be, and that failure was only one part of the wheel of life.

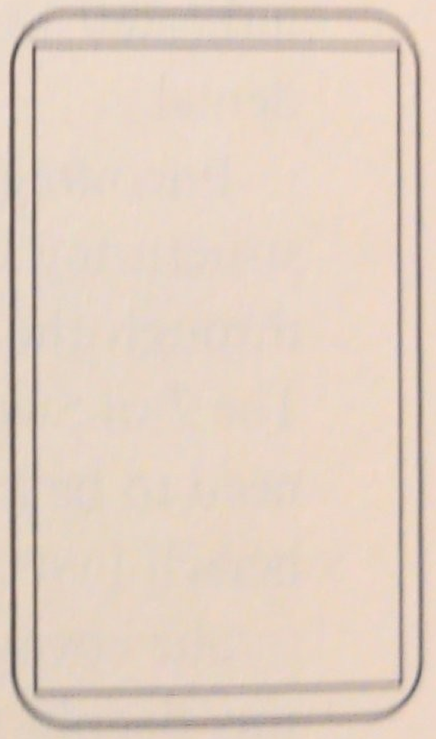
This spread gave Elaine a lot to think about. She saw that taking Step Three would be a process of discovering both herself and the Divine Presence. Two weeks later, with Sandy and a few other close friends from the Wiccan group, Elaine rededicated her life and her will. She used the format according to the Step Three ritual in the *Recovery Spiral*











ELAINE'S STEP THREE READING—CLARIFICATION

Book of Shadows. Elaine was fortunate to have understanding and interested supporters. She chose this way of affirming her spiritual path because she consciously needed to have the support of trusted companions—support that she had not sensed from her family in her growing-up years.

Phil's Story

As Stacey became involved in her twelve-step work, her brother-in-law, Phil, continued to work his program. These days, exploring the idea of a Pagan spirituality, Phil had become very aware that he was still vulnerable to addictive patterns in his relationships, especially with women. He found it more meaningful to hold his formal rituals in private. He spent some time studying his Step Three reading, and noticed that his reservations were connected directly to what he found. Doing the Step Three ritual (see *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*) was easy—until he had to make his decision to turn his will and his life in a new direction.

He didn't have much trouble "talking the talk." Somehow this seemed very different—standing alone before the God and the Goddess. He had too often relied on the opinions of others to validate him—his sexuality, attractiveness, and spirituality—and this was a challenge to him to take responsibility for himself.

In preparation, he bought a rose, previously a gesture he had made only to attractive women—and offered that in thanksgiving. During the ritual, he decided that he needed to bring a fresh flower home regularly to remind him of his decision, the beauty of the world around him, and the fragility of recovery and life. He placed it on the TV tray he was using for an altar. Repeating this simple activity every week or so helped him focus on his recovery. Phil felt renewed and refreshed.

Step Four

This step is a difficult one for most. It says:

Made a searching and fearless ethical inventory of ourselves.

When we begin this recovery journey, we often do so because of the pressure of others. A Step Four inventory is not about what others have

done to us or what they expect of us. It is not about meeting some moral code. It is not about running ourselves down with shame. It is not about pretending our actions only harmed ourselves, or only harmed others. It is not about denial.

Step Four assumes that we have not done very well at recognizing reality. Our addictions impair our ability to perceive reality by placing something between reality and our true selves.

Often, when we are active in our addictions, we paint with a very broad brush, only in black or white. Additionally, this step assumes that we are capable of ethical response to our world, and that we can identify what we have done.

An inventory is only a list. We can make up our own lists. We are not filling out a grocery list with a space for "one bottle of ketchup." We have a blank page. We can have an unopened bottle, as well as a little bit in the bottom of another one. We record what is really there.

Inventories

Different kinds of inventories exist, from daily to specific issues to overall issues. When we come to recovery, our first inventory is usually broad and can cover our entire lifetime. The scope of this task is daunting. We can equate this task to having selected a piece of land on which to build a house. Here, the land we have selected is the commitment to recovery. We have to clear away enough rubble and undergrowth so we can put in a foundation. This first inventory is a great deal more like using a bulldozer than selecting the exact shade for the guest room.

As Pagans, many of us acknowledge the cycles of death and rebirth. At the end, which is also the beginning, the seeds must go back to their elements. If we encase them in concrete, nothing can grow from them. In our addictive behaviors, we have encased the seeds of our selves, our motives, and our actions in a covering of shame, secrecy, and denial. It is wisely said that we are only as sick as our secrets.

Only I can know my motives, and only I can know the secrets of my heart. In active addictions, even *I* don't know these things. This is the searching part of the inventory. No one can take my inventory for me. The Divine Presence can be there as Guardian, Seeker, and Guide, I have to do the actual work. The Divine and I are Seekers together. We are free to be adventurous, social, and intuitive. We can search and

make a list of what we find. Our curiosity serves us, helping rather than harming.

The "fearless" part comes in when we invite the Divine Presence to be Guardian as well. The Wiccan writer Starhawk, in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), shows over and over that where there is fear, there is power. When we move in fear, and give away our power to anyone or anything else, we are betraying our ethic. We are avoiding responsibility for our lives, actions, and choices. We cannot have good relationships with ourselves, the Divine Presence, or others without accepting the consequences of our actions.

Fear, giving away our power, is one of the building blocks of substance or process addictions. We fear that what has happened may happen again. We fear that we will not be able to handle what may happen. We live in the past or future, spending as little time in the present as possible. The adrenaline rush we get when being dramatic focuses our energies away from the fear that we may be wrong, or unlovable, or just silly. The glow of calmness that we experience when bingeing on food insulates us from the chaos around us and focuses our energy away from the fear that there won't be enough money to make the rent. The repetitive motions of pulling on our hair may soothe our fear that no one will be there for us when we need them. Brief, intense sexuality may distract us from the fear of being alone. Taking care of others distracts us from the fear that no one will take care of us.

It comes back to our own fears. If we are going to be fearless in this step, we have to call back our power. The ritual in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* is one way to do this.

Power

After calling back our power, we are ready to work on the step. Literally hundreds of formats are available, some of which may be very helpful. The format I offer is the one I use myself.

A simple way to begin the ethical part of the inventory list is to actually write down, or in some way record, the answers to the following questions. The time covered can be limited (lifetime, past three months), as can the circumstances (work, family, home) or the issues (addictive behaviors, jealousy, being late).

- Whom do I resent and why?
- What do I fear and why?
- Where do I never want to be again and why?
- When do I feel superior and why?
- How do I live in the past or the future?
- Why do I use processes or substances to protect me from present reality?

Here is where we can see how our ethics have either been upheld or not. The first time I did my own inventory, I came away feeling terrible. I could only see the harm I had done to others. I was extremely harsh with myself. I shone the light of a very Structuring Guardian into the corners of myself and had no trouble coming up with where I had been wrong. My inventory was mostly negative.

I went back and answered the questions again. This time I used the lens of the Accepting Guardian and discovered that all my ethical problems were not my fault. My inventory was mostly self-serving and nice to me. I came away feeling very sorry for myself.

The third time, I used the lens of the Considering Guardian, taking into account the voices of the other Guardians. This time I didn't use the addictive process of all-or-nothing thinking. I tried to get a grip on reality. This time I assumed a continuum, a spiral.

Of Ourselves

It's easy to take someone else's inventory. We can see with eagle-sharp vision the faults of others and can easily spot a phony or insincere person. Unfortunately, one of the best defenses is a good offense.

Projection occurs when we take something we don't like about ourselves and project it on another. If deep down inside I feel like a hypocrite because I don't always tell the truth, I may spend a great deal of time saying someone else is a hypocrite and condemning him or her for it.

Projecting our fears and guilt, as well as the character traits we wish we didn't have, is a part of our disease. We will continue to use this as a coping mechanism, and it takes a great deal of time, energy, and resources to even begin to see all the ways we use, and have used, this tool. When we get to Step Ten, we will find ourselves coming back

again and again to the idea of taking inventory, and following up our insight with action.

Elaine's Story

In a weird sort of way, the less like our projection someone really is, the more believable the accusation becomes. At one point, Sandy had accused Elaine of never reaching out to others. In turn, Elaine accused Sandy of having virtually no life outside of work and home, of spending too much time with others. Looking at them, we can see that they were projecting their problems onto each other. Even after this argument, Elaine doubled her volunteer time with the Big Sister program. She ignored her Divine Guide, who could see the situation, and instead made things worse. Elaine had a horror of being selfish and wanted to be sure that she really wasn't.

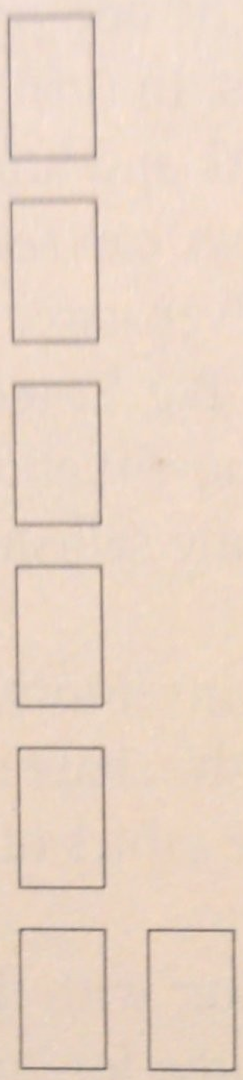
As Elaine began to work on her Step Four inventory, she took back her power from a mother that had demanded she share everything with her siblings. Then she was ready to look at the ethics of helping others while harming herself.

When Elaine began her inventory, as a Seeker with the Divine Presence, she found that she was resentful of Sandy, for "making" her do more volunteer work. Having reclaimed her power, she was able to hold her actions and her motives up to her ethics, represented by the Guardian part of both herself and the Divine. Finally, she was able to make a reasonable and effective evaluation as she worked with her Guide self. First, she realized that Sandy hadn't "made" her do anything. She saw that helping others was a very ethical thing to do, but that her first responsibility was to herself. She realized that some of her "helping" was harming others as well. She was keeping them from learning from their actions.

In her Step Four reading, Elaine found confirmation for her insight. Her motive card, the King of Wands (reversed), spoke of low self-esteem, lack of personal power, and fear that others would simply stand by and not help. This was reinforced by the 2 of Wands in her behavior position. Elaine did tend to send out good deeds and wait around for others to do their part. She often lacked the support she needed, a confirmation of the motive card. Part of her frustration was that she couldn't make others do what she wanted them to do. Her experience

ELAINE'S STEP FOUR READING

Cards were arranged like this:



IX

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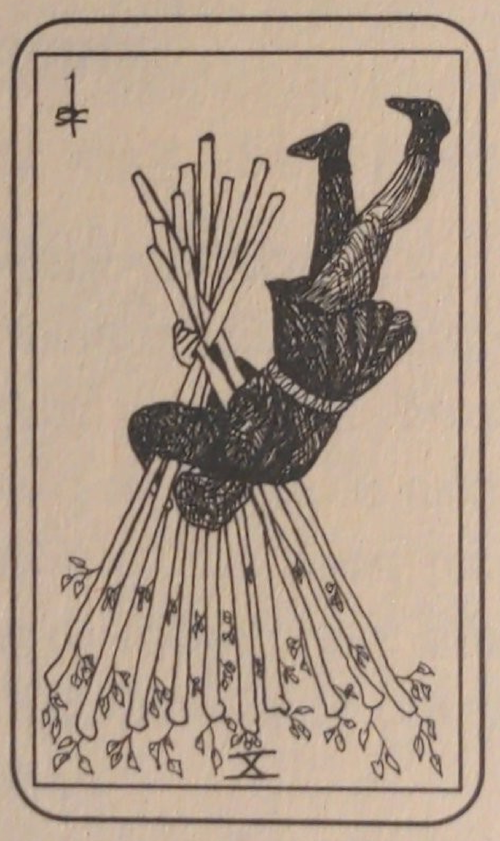
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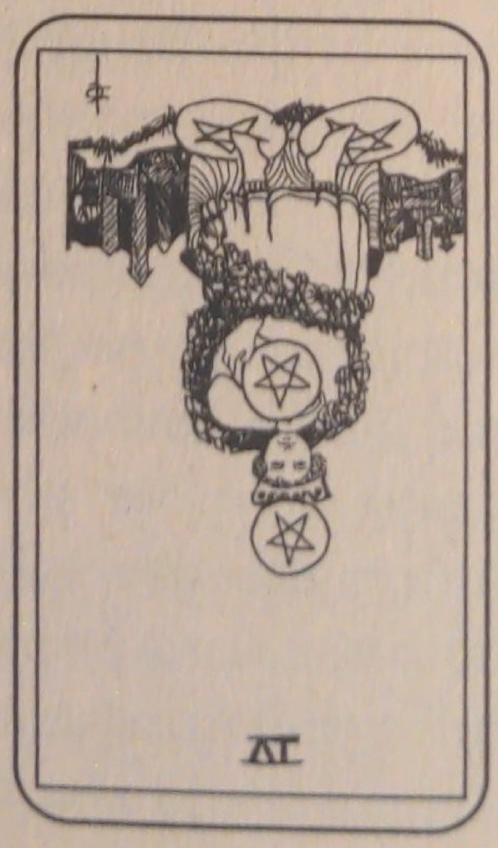

IV

card, the 9 of Pentacles (reversed), spoke of others holding power over her financial future, her desire to keep the surface calm, and her lack of independence. Her ethic up until now had been based on the need to hold on to things as they were, fearing change would bring loss.

When she turned over the lesson card, the 10 of Wands, she recognized the "Codependence Card." She *was* carrying the burden for others, and she felt the weight of the world on her shoulders. The advice card, the Page of Cups, this time reversed, had been prominent in her other readings. She needed to look again carefully at not only the situation and her evaluation of it. She pulled a clarifying card for the advice. The 6 of Cups sent her back to her childhood, which was not wonderful, though she did not think it was *that* bad compared with what others had experienced. She saw again the theme of sharing with her siblings as a requirement for love and acceptance.

She didn't feel ready to move on to the next step. She had done the Step Four ritual, but she did the ritual to reclaim her power a second time, this time focusing on her addiction to the good feelings she got when she helped others. She was pleased to find that even though she had done the ritual once, the second time was much more powerful; it felt deeper. She came away with more insight, more sense of the Divine Presence, and more determination to work on recovery.

Codependence

The term *codependence* became popular when those who worked with alcoholics and drug addicts began to recognize that the family, coworkers, and friends of the alcoholic or addict had identifiable symptoms. These symptoms were at first thought to be "caused" by the addict/alcoholic. More observation and research indicated that these symptoms had an independent existence of their own. For example, it was possible to say that a child raised in an alcoholic home would often choose a mate who was alcoholic, or would choose someone who showed some very similar characteristics such as emotional unavailability or irresponsible behaviors. This allowed the child, as an adult, to continue caretaking behaviors that had been required in the early family. The adult child became dependent on caretaking for a sense of self-worth, and thus codependent on the alcoholic's continued problems.

The other likely option was that such children would themselves

abuse substances, or exhibit similar characteristics. Research over time demonstrated that the greater the duration, severity, and genetic closeness of the substance abuse, the more likely the child would be to immediately move into the behaviors of active dependence or codependence—or both.

Part of codependence is rooted in our fear of being abandoned, or left without resources and the ability to take care of our own basic needs. Under the best of circumstances, with adequate financial and emotional resources, raising a family is a difficult challenge. We are not given training on how to be a parent. We, or our own parents, often have little or no emotional, financial, or social helping networks. Children (in age or attitude) often raise children. Fortunately, there are also parents and other authority figures who are competent and willing adults, who have made a conscious decision to nurture young life.

Active addicts cannot provide what a child needs, partly because their addictions freeze them emotionally with only a child's emotional equipment. If our home was one where substance or process abuse was overt or covert, we learned that our needs often took second place to the needs of the addict. An *adult parent* can make choices that put the welfare of the child in an appropriate context. An *addict*, or *child parent* cannot consistently make those decisions because the substance or process comes between them and the reality of their responsibilities. This happened to my mother during the tornado that I described in the preface. If the primary caregivers in our early years are unable or unwilling to provide for our emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs, we learn to be suspicious. Our suspicions focus on our unlovableness, our unworthiness, or ourselves.

As children, we do not have the perspective to understand that the problem is with the caregivers, not with ourselves. We experience fear, panic, and confusion. In small doses, as we are learning to live in a world with others, these emotions can be the catalysts for change and growth. In unpredictable or large doses, we must adapt or die.

In addition, there is often the spoken—or unspoken—message that our responses and feelings are "wrong." The grown-up's behaviors are "right," and we must not complain or tell others. Somehow, if we do that, we will be exposed as wrong and therefore be unworthy of consistent and loving care. We absorb the notion that we have to "earn" the basics of living and loving.

We get messages from our cultures that encourage us to respect adults, to discount our experiences as "childish," and to be honest. How can we possibly put this conflicting stuff together? There is a vast gap between our internal reality and the world around us. The only way we can survive, since we cannot control the circumstances and people around us, is to control our responses. We begin to try to control our responses by ignoring certain aspects of our lives, by telling ourselves they are not important, or by placing something between ourselves and reality. This is addiction. As younger people with fewer resources and options, it was really helpful to us because it allowed us to find a measure of safety in our world.

We are the lucky ones. The ones who cannot find that safety inside or outside, die. Yet addictions, too, are a pathway toward death. Next we'll see how we can continue toward a spiral of recovery and healing for those early wounds.

Step Five—Transition

Once we have begun to see the problems our process or substance addictions have caused for ourselves and others, we are ready to do something practical. Even if we do the searching and fearless ethical inventory of Step Four, we cannot continue our healing if we do not talk about what we learned. Insight without action is just another form of addiction, placing our insight between reality and ourselves. We can easily use our insight as an excuse to continue exercising our addictions. If we do not consider our context, our world, then we have not done an honest job of looking at ourselves.

Step Five says:

> *Admitted to ourselves, to the Divine Presence, and to others the exact nature of our harm.*

The Divine Presence is reflected in our world and in others, as well as ourselves. We experience our context, our world, as stagnant (unable to change, frozen in the past), chaotic (changing unpredictably, for good or ill, and we cannot impact the future), or cyclical (predictable but not predetermined).

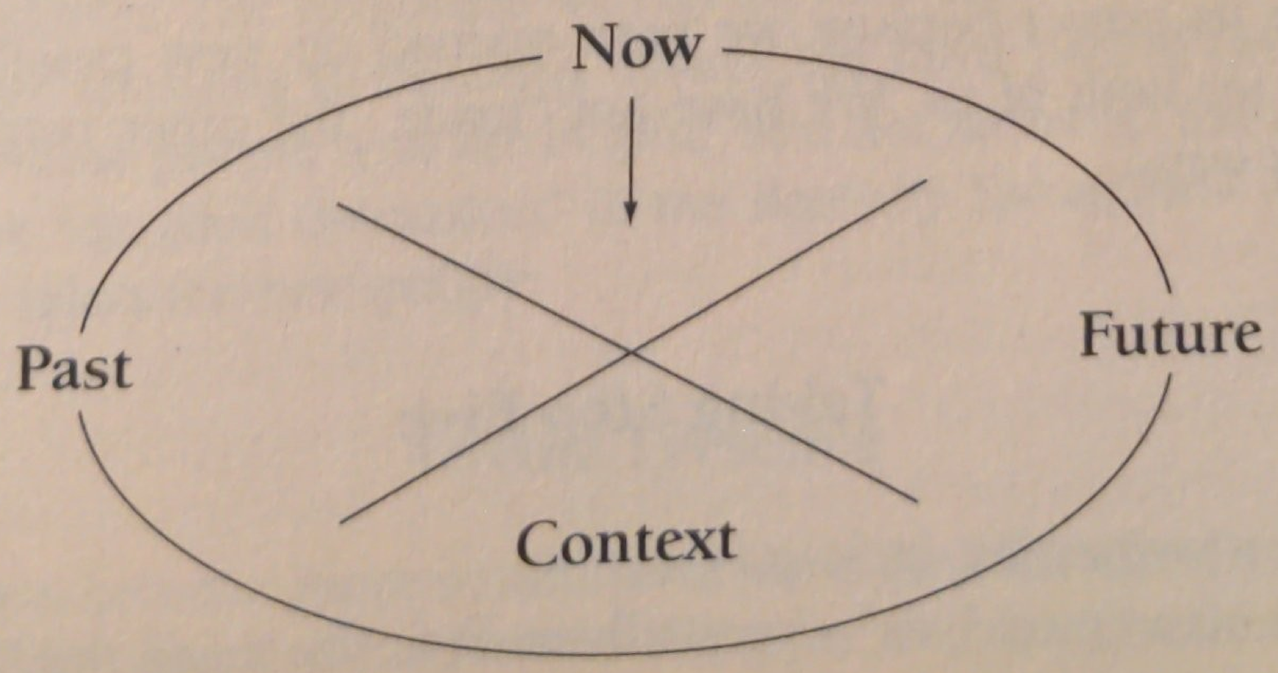
To understand how the threefold division works, I offer an explana-

tion taken from Alfred North Whitehead's concept of *Process Metaphysics* (1978). Pretending for the purpose of illustration that we can somehow capture the present moment as a single point, we can imagine two open-ended triangles meeting at that point. The triangle on the left represents the past. The one on the right represents the future. The point is the immediate now. All that went into the left triangle, our past, has culminated in this point of now. Every decision we made, every path we chose, the effect of every bit of our context is contained in that triangle. So while this moment is predictable based on our past, it is also not predetermined. We could have made a different choice or walked a different path. The right triangle represents all the possibilities open to us as a result of this now. This does not mean that anything is possible.

For example, if I have never taken a piano lesson in my life, the possibility that I will be invited to play piano with the Boston Symphony next week is simply not available to me. I have not done the preparation. So, too, when we have the weight of our addictive behavior coming into the now, our possibilities are very limited.

The good news is that at any point, we can make a choice that improves our next choices. The work that we decide to do now may increase the positive possibilities in the next moment. For example, if I go into a grocery store that has a long line, I can make a number of choices. I can choose to wait in the line. I can choose to snarl and snap at the cashier, or I can choose to smile and commiserate. I can choose to rob the store rather than paying for my food. If I choose to steal, what my choice is becomes less important, because in choosing to break the law I have made a decision with immediate impact. I have opened up the possibility of being arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced.

After stealing, I cannot choose not to steal. The best I can do is make



amends. After using my addictive patterns, I cannot choose not to use. The best I can do is make amends to myself and others.

Here is a very subtle but important point. No one can "make" or cause another person to feel, think, or decide anything. We truly make our own choices, as do others.

Philosophers talk about different kinds of "causes," or reasons that things happen. One kind of cause has to do with training, disposition, and habit. This is one kind of cause we address in a twelve-step recovery spiral. Because there are layers over layers, we continue to learn and relearn lessons. What we bring into any moment, includes these "causes."

Another kind of "cause" has to do with our actual physical nature. No matter how much I wanted to be a fire engine when I was little, my ambition was not going to be fulfilled. In the Serenity Prayer, we ask for help accepting the things we cannot change. This kind of cause is something we simply have no power over.

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me
The serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can, and
Wisdom to know the difference.

We also do not have the power of ultimate cause over others. We may know them well enough to make a very good guess about their reaction to something we say or do. We may be accustomed to these responses, or our own. All we can change here is what we bring into the present moment. We cannot change what others bring. We can change our attitude, our actions, and our boundaries. In a way, this does give us power because we have opened up new possibilities of response for both of us. We have not "made" the other respond in a particular way.

Taking Step Five

We made a written list in Step Four.

To "admit to ourselves" seems silly at first. We made the list, didn't

we? Yes, we did. Yet it is my experience that saying something aloud brings a new dimension and depth to the written word.

Take the time to read your inventory list aloud. Hear your own words. Reading into a tape recorder may make "hearing" easier.

Hearing is one of the skills we often confuse with listening. To really hear ourselves, or others, we need to let the words and the meanings go more deeply inside. We often let our mind skim the surface and say that we have "heard." Often we are thinking about what we are going to say when it's our turn, rather than what the speaker is trying to convey.

A technique for hearing is to place two chairs facing each other. One is the speaking chair, and the other is the hearing chair. Sit in the speaking chair, and read a part of the inventory aloud. Switch chairs. Try to hear what was said. Don't try to fix things or reflect on them. The task is to hear. Say aloud what you heard.

Continue back and forth until the words and the intentions sink in deeply enough to be heard.

The first time I tried this, I was somewhat embarrassed to be talking to myself. I read aloud a bit of an inventory I had done on being late. When I switched to the hearing chair, my first response was to try to fix the problem. I went back to the speaking chair and read again. In the hearing chair I just repeated back the words. Into the speaking chair again, I read with more emotion. I added some other things to help explain my inventory. Back in the hearing chair, I was able to catch some of the underlying nuances.

I found myself having a genuine dialogue with myself. Part of what came out of that was a respect for myself and a stronger will to change the things I could.

The ritual in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* can be another part of actually taking Step Five. In this ritual, we read aloud our inventory to each quarter. The responses we receive help us.

Actually speaking to others is usually the third part of this step. Be sure to choose people who are helpful, and not harmful. You may want to use the "decision divination" in the *Recovery Spiral Tarot Manual* to help you select the best people.

Divine Presence

As we have become more comfortable with the idea of a Divine Presence, we can often find help in specific aspects of the Divine, which are

also reflected in ourselves and the world around us. For Step Five, the Structuring Guardian can help us sort out our responsibilities and our rights. The Social Seeker can help us learn to reach out to others, and to accept their reaching out to us. The Literal Guide can help us focus on what we need to do in the present moment.

We can continue to use the image of the touching triangles to help us understand more about our lives. We can imagine that the spaces above and below the past and present triangles represent our context—the situations, people, and places around us. The Divine Presence, our world, and others are all a part of what enfolds us. Whether we like it or not, there is a background on which the triangles are drawn, which is the context in which we are situated. Our addictive behaviors blind our ability to see our context. If we wish to recover, we must once again connect to those around us.

Step Five reconnects us once again to our context. Each of us is responsible for making the initial moves, for pursuing what we need. We cannot simultaneously make excuses and be successful in our recovery spiral.

Phil's Story

Lately Phil had been attending meetings with a group of Pagans. He had tried a number of ways to work a recovery program. This group seemed very different. For one thing, the members talked a lot more about their relationships with others. From his past work, he understood the maxims, "Keep It Simple, Stupid" and "Live and Let Live." These bits of wisdom, used by themselves, allowed him to pretend that he really didn't need all those messy emotional and relational connections. This allowed him to continue his addiction to unhealthy relationships.

Phil had done several written fourth-step inventories as a part of the rehabilitation programs for his various addictions. Somehow, he had never really gotten around to doing a thorough and in-person Step Five. To him, his moral inventory had been clear about the "exact nature of his wrongs." He did have a graveside chat with his long-deceased father. He had no trouble telling others that he was morally bankrupt, given to lying, cheating, and conning people. To him this had been adequate

for Step Five. He continued to substitute one addiction for another, never seeming to really "get" the program.

At one of these meetings, another participant, Sean, began talking about an ethical Step Four inventory he had done, and how hard it was to actually tell someone else how he had harmed himself and others. Sean felt stupid, like he should have known better. He was ashamed of some of his motives and some of his actions. He described the physical sensation of actually seeing red because he was so acutely embarrassed to look someone else in the eye who *knew* the truth about him. Sean talked about how the Tarot readings had helped him.

Curious and skeptical, Phil asked Sean to do a reading for him. Phil's Step Four reading confirmed what he already knew. His motive (9 of Swords) was simply to survive, to get through the horror and the nightmare of his life. His behavior (8 of Wands) indicated good progress toward worthy goals, while his experience (Knight of Pentacles) was that solid, careful steps would result in a stable life, but not much freedom or depth. Phil's experience also taught him to keep his emotions to himself and be sure that he had his armor in place at all times.

He wanted his ethic (the Star) to be based on a belief that there was enough to go around, that he could be healthy, and so could others. He genuinely wanted to see women in a different way, as people with their own power, needs, wants, and personalities. He wanted to learn how to relate honestly.

Phil's recovery did not take away from anyone else. There was some wishful thinking as well—as if scrupulous following of the rules, which left little room for intuition, would somehow be more ethical than learning about and dealing with the reality of his personal situation. The lesson of the reversed Strength card had to do with looking at his passions and drives, and seeing that they were a part of him, but not *all* of him. It was time for a change, and that meant he had to connect on a genuine level to the world around him. The advice from the 3 of Swords was to let go of the past and to accept the pain and distress of reaching out and not being sure of the outcome.

For Phil, who had been around twelve-step recovery for years, this seemed like a foreign idea. He was afraid to let down his emotional shields. He was spiritually thirsty enough to try the Pagan ideas. His experience with the Pagans in the group opened his eyes to seeing how a meaningful and real relationship might begin to grow. Performing

PHIL'S
STEP FOUR
READING

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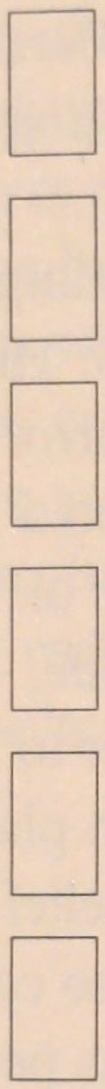
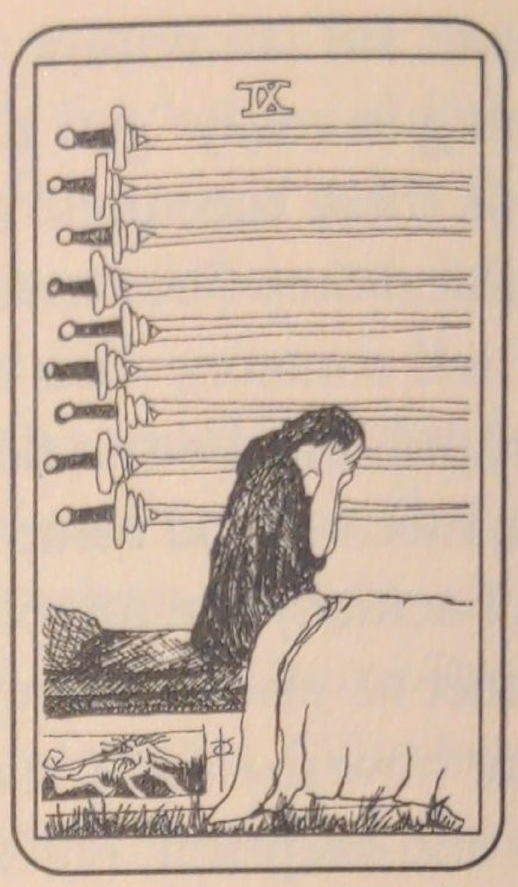
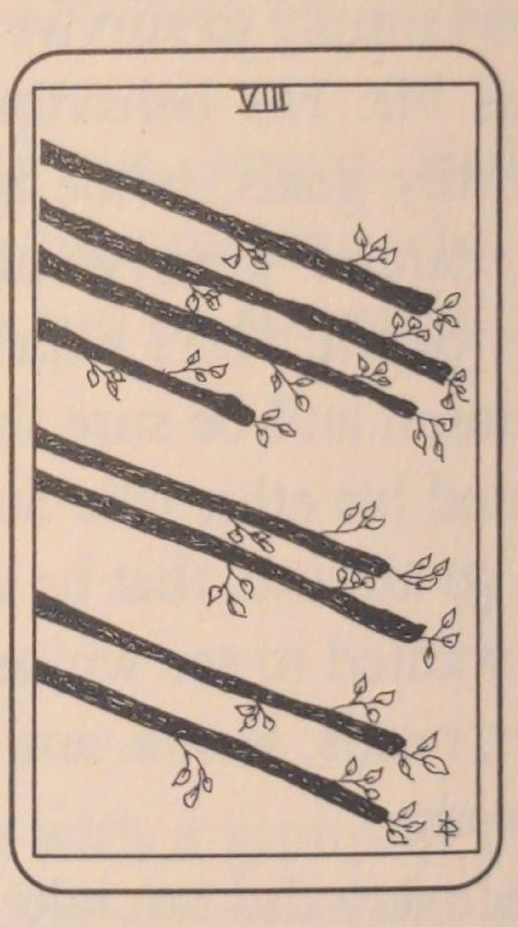
arranged
like this:

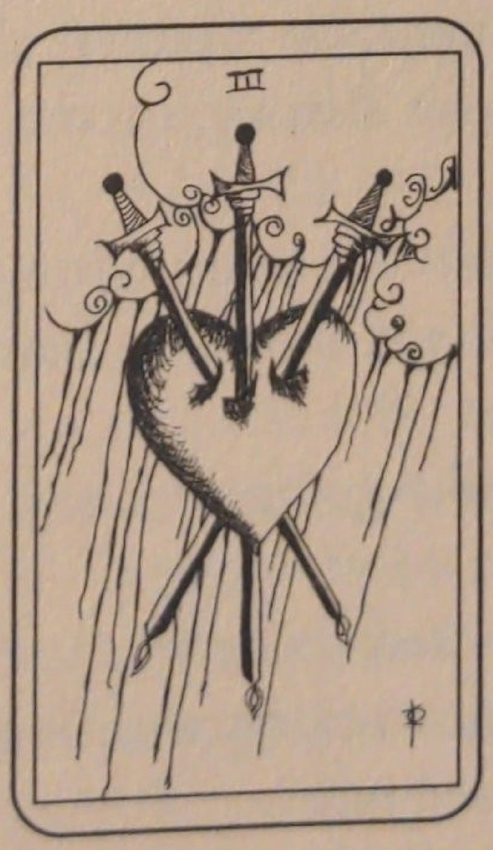






XVII
THE STAR.

STRENGTH.
VIII


III

rituals with silly rhymes seemed rather pointless, though he did it. He bought a deck of Tarot cards and, using a "how-to" book, dutifully did his readings and recorded them.

Encouraged by the balanced but overall positive Step Four reading, Phil decided to ask Sean to listen to his Step Five. Sean readily agreed. Phil had prepared a lovely speech about how bad he had been and how he had used women in the past. He concluded that it was understandable, considering the terrible things in his life and the poor role models his parents had been for him.

Sean was silent for a few moments, then looked at Phil. "Do you really expect me to buy this? What you give with one hand you are taking with the other."

The image of the flowing water on the Star card flashed in front of Phil's eyes. "No, I don't really expect you to believe me. You're right. I'm still holding on. The truth is I'm desperate. I've almost died so many times that I know I don't have another try at recovery in me. I feel empty, but I don't want to be. I don't know how to go about doing this work. Will you help me?"

Over the next few weeks, Sean and Phil met regularly to talk. Phil began to gain confidence and take off his emotional armor.

At a Recovery weekend retreat, a mutual friend came over to Phil and asked him how he could spend so much time with a blabbermouth like Sean.

Instantly Phil's defenses rose. How could he have been so stupid? How could he ever trust anyone again? All this Pagan stuff was just garbage. At dinner that night, he rebuffed all of Sean's friendly overtures, but because they were sharing a room, Phil couldn't avoid Sean forever.

"What gives?" asked Sean the next morning.

"Nothing," snarled Phil, slamming the bathroom door.

A couple of hours later, Phil ran into his sister-in-law Stacey, who had been rather sporadically going to meetings. She noticed a change and commented on it.

"Phil, you're like you used to be in the old days, all clammed up inside. I though you were working with Sean. You're acting just like Carl does when he's stressed out."

That stopped Phil cold. Carl was still using cocaine to deal with his problems at work, and with Stacey. Phil thought he was way past that,

but he knew enough to recognize that he was back into his addictive cycle. He tried to explain to Stacey.

"I'm not using. It's just that Sean's been blabbing to everyone about me."

Stacey got angry. "What if he has? Does it make anything you've said less true, or were you lying to him? Were you doing this to look good to others or to deal with your own stuff?" She stomped away.

Phil was mystified. "I wonder what that was about."

Sean came up behind him. "Phil, I owe you an apology. I took it really personally when you slammed the bathroom door this morning. I left the room rather than talking about it. I felt guilty that I hadn't called my wife, and you sounded just like her, and that ticked me off. Damn, now I'm doing it again. I'm blaming her because I'm angry. Sorry, Phil."

Phil felt guilty too. He motioned for Sean to step out onto the balcony. "I owe you an apology too." He told Sean what had happened.

Sean looked down at his shoes. "It's true. I am a blabbermouth about other people's problems. I get a rush when I'm the good guy and someone else is worse than I am. I'm working on it, but it's hard. I'm still doing some inventory work on it. Would you hear my Step Five when I'm ready?"

"But did you tell anyone about me?" asked Phil.

"No, but I really have been tempted," responded Sean.

Phil considered the 3 of Swords. He realized that he was hanging on to his fear of being betrayed, and his pattern of emotional withdrawal. Suddenly, he knew that his fear was an important part of his addiction. One day, he would have to face that fear as a responsible and mature adult. For now, he could recognize the fear was not helping when he was dealing with a trustworthy friend. He found his strength and was able to say honestly, "Sure, I'd like to hear your Step Five, if you'll keep listening to mine."

As he pulled the Step Five Spread, he was amazed. All his cards were reversed, indicating an ongoing problem. Two cards were Cups, reflecting his battle with his emotions. All three were high cards, indicating the end of one cycle and the beginning of a new cycle.

The reversed 10 of Cups in the position of difficulty with admitting to the self indicated Phil's fear of loss of reputation as a ladies' man, or a carefully built picture of contentment, peace, and happiness. The

PHIL'S STEP FIVE READING

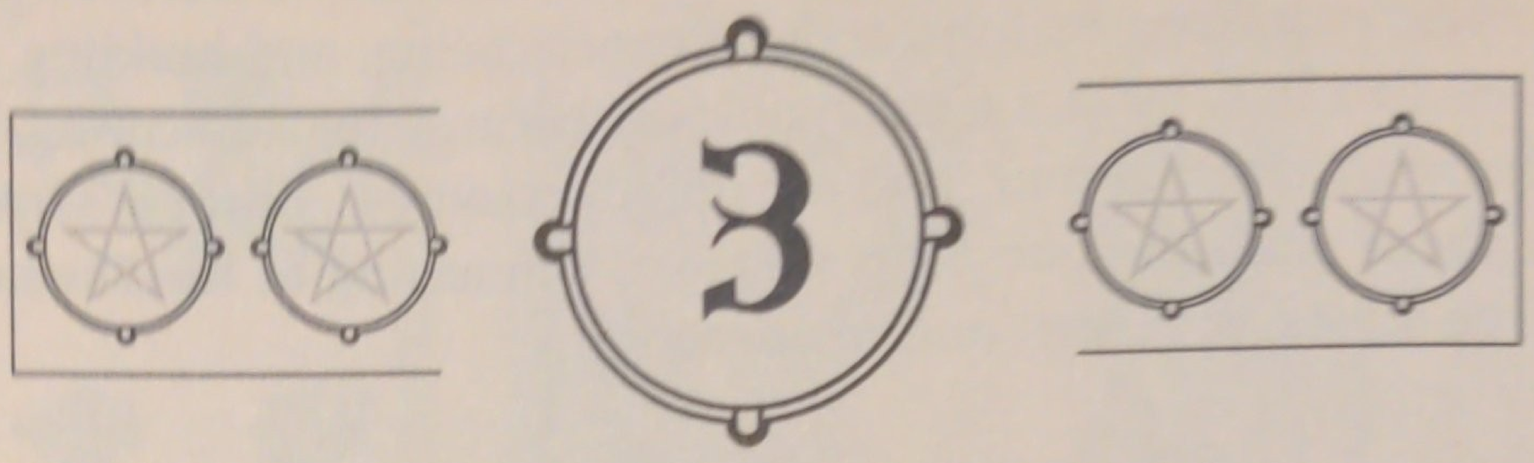
Queen of Cups (reversed) seemed to say Phil's difficulty with admitting his harm to the Divine was that he would never be able to regain control of those slippery, and in this card, irrevocably spilled, emotions. He somehow had to maintain a stable façade even in his private interactions with the Divine. He had come to believe the Divine included both a goddess and a god. He wasn't surprised to see the reversed 9 of Wands in the "others" position. He saw himself as barely able to take care of himself, struggling to break even while keeping up the pretense of success.

Phil thought he would be comfortable talking with—and perhaps imitating—someone who had already solved his problems. He was aware of his intuition sounding a warning. He had talked to others like counselors, who in his mind seemed to have most of their problems solved. In actual practice, he would begin a recovery path, but then quit because others seemed to have it all together. Inwardly he suspected that he could never achieve that himself. He told himself that anyone who was okay was precisely the person who would not understand his struggles. And of course, he believed people who were struggling could not help him. Phil realized that he was setting up an impossible situation and that he simply needed to try a new way.

Summary

Steps Three, Four, and Five move us out of our absorption with ourselves. We begin to experience that we are part of the web of life. Each

decision that we make affects ourselves and others. We are connected. Our addictions keep us from feeling, experiencing, and building connections in a healthy and meaningful way because the addictions drain our energy, waste our time, and use up our resources. In these steps we learn about choosing our paths together, connecting to the Divine, to our true selves, to others, and to our world.



3

ACCEPTING CHANGE:

The Principle of Emotional Honesty

Steps Six and Seven

We cannot truly change and grow unless we are willing to look at ourselves and our lives as works in progress. We need to have all of ourselves available to us, including our emotions. We do harm if we pretend that our emotions are not worth noticing. We have spent a great deal of energy and time trying to change our emotions with addictive behaviors because we didn't like them the way they were. If we wish to recover, we need to live in reality and accept the reality of others. This means validating the truth of our emotions, and theirs. As we continue to develop relationships on deeper and deeper levels, as we continue the spiral, we must be rigorously honest with ourselves and others. Denial will send us backward, spiraling into addictions.

To honor the West, the place of emotions and relationships, we are *emotionally honest with ourselves and one another.* We commit to self-reflection, and to openness to change and to the process of facing and accepting uncomfortable emotions in ourselves and one another. We tell one another the truth about ourselves, even when it is difficult.

In this chapter we consider replacing our addictive behaviors with other, more helpful, behaviors. After we have prepared ourselves, we will look at what happens when we need the change to go all the way down to the core of our being.

Addictive behaviors and attitudes can provide great comfort. No one wants to feel bad or unhappy. The chemical changes that happened to us when we indulged our addictions were *real* changes. Because they affected our inner selves and our feelings, we could point to our emotions as validation that it was okay to continue. The problem is that these behaviors resulted in immediate or ultimate harm to ourselves and others.

Harmful Cycles

In the first five steps, we made new choices based on our insights and intuitions. We asked for help. We may have discovered that wanting to get rid of our old patterns was not enough. We need to deliberately replace those patterns with other skills.

It is not enough to declare a change, or manifest it for a few weeks. Many people try to deal with their addiction with a sudden "flight into health." The problem is that such a flight is all about the surface presentation and does not touch our inner core. Steps Six and Seven are about changing the inner core of the self, not just the outside.

A flight into health is a pretty common way to deal with immediate problems. It is easier to get a good, strong start than to follow through. We can swear to never touch another drop, never use another credit card, and never go off the diet. We truly have good intentions. We truly do not want to go to jail, file bankruptcy, or feel uncomfortable when we try on jeans. We have a picture of how wonderful life would be if this pesky problem would just go away. We may be tired of other people being on our case, or drained by our own bouts with self-hatred. Unfortunately, this leads us back into the negative spiral of the addictions cycle.

Addictive cycles can also be seen in cycles of denial, domestic violence, or codependence. In this type of a cycle, things go along pretty well for a while. This is called the *tension-building* phase. Things may not be perfect. There may be big or little things that are annoying, frightening, or uncomfortable. Yet it seems silly to go overboard or to harp on minor things. Major things are (we assume) so self-evident that others will understand the problem and we don't need to say anything. This stage is characterized by closing our eyes, pretending things are not as bad (or as good) as they really are. We remain silent, or overdra-

matize and try to manipulate to get things back on an even keel. We are not emotionally honest with ourselves or with others, and tension continues to build.

The second part of the addictive cycle begins when one incident, one feeling, one last straw is too important to be ignored, or the pressure is too great. The obvious trigger might be anything from the loss of a job, to a confrontation with a family member or a forgotten chore. Whatever the problem, it gets "loaded" with all the frustrations, silence, and resentments of the period of emotional dishonesty. Often the "load" includes feelings that are connected to our past, which doesn't directly involve the present situation except by resemblance. This is the *intensity,* or *emotional heat,* phase. Because people react differently, the intensity can either be heated, like an argument, or cool, like being extremely polite, exact, and proper. There is often a lot of blaming, self-righteousness, and "scoring points" at this stage, whether overt or covert. The impact is to call attention to the problem and to force it into the open.

Oftentimes, children will "act out" to focus attention on a problem between adult partners. When tensions are too high in the family, children have to do something to lessen the pressure. Eating disorders that begin in childhood or adolescence are seen partly as the child's attempt to get help for the adult partners. For instance, an anorexic adolescent may be "showing" a lack of nurture in her life by not nurturing her own body. A person who compulsively binges on food may be showing that his family "stuffs down" or represses uncomfortable emotions. By attracting attention to themselves, the children may bring the adults to the attention of other adults, such as physicians or other family members, who may be able to help. A child may do poorly in school to help bring feuding partners together to help with the grades. Children do not consciously do this, but frequent connections between specific children's behavior problems and specific tensions between adults are too often repeated to be coincidence.

The third part of the cycle is the *flight into health,* or *the honeymoon* stage. Something has happened to reduce the tension by bringing it into the open in the second part of the cycle. The discomfort or misery was too intense. We try to find ways to make things better. When things are very intense in a cycle of domestic violence, this is the time for gifts and flowers and apologies. In an acute alcohol addiction cycle, the drinker goes into treatment or "goes on the wagon." In a cycle of severe code-

pendency, the codependent decides never to get taken in again, viewing any emotional ties to others with unwarranted distrust. The money abusers either tighten their belts as an attempt at self-discipline, or become very generous, as Scrooge did after his encounter with the three ghosts. The addict realizes that there is a problem, even if it is just with other people's reactions. The intensity of the reaction matches the intensity of the second stage.

We learn by repetition. Our repeated thoughts, feelings, and interactions dig ruts in the roads of our lives. Clinically, the term for this is the "homeostasis of the system." The system—whether it is the addiction itself, the family, the social system, or the community—wants to stay the same. It is easier to follow the rut than to build a new road. The next easiest thing is to carve a brand new road that goes to the same place. This is what the "flight into health" attempts to do.

Step Six asks us to examine our roads carefully. We are aware of the ruts, and we make plans to change both the route and the destination. We may still want to stay out of jail, but our motive changes. From simply not wanting to be caught and punished, we are choosing to operate out of an ethical center, taking into account ourselves, the Divine Presence, our world, and others.

Step Six

Step Six seems so simple that it does not often get the consideration it needs or deserves. The Sixth Step says:

> *Were entirely ready to have our harmful patterns replaced by ethical coping skills.*

After the struggles of the first five steps, this step seems to call for little more than intellectual assent. We can see the harm we've caused. We don't want to continue that. We can see no reason to hang on to this garbage. Therefore, we think, we are ready to have these replaced with better stuff.

But what better stuff? If we do not acknowledge that these skills were in some way useful to us, what will we do when a situation comes up that we have never faced without our addictive behaviors and attitudes?

In some cases, the addictive skills we learned kept us and others alive. As we discussed in Step Four, a person cannot psychologically live without adaptive behaviors. These old patterns served us at one time, and now no longer serve us in the same way. Such unproductive and harmful patterns go far beyond clinical definitions of addiction. Examples include simple denial, shutting down uncomfortable feelings, intellectualizing, rationalizing, over- or undereating, acting out sexually or emotionally, taking care of others, chemical dependence, miserliness or overspending, violence, lying, and greed.

On the other hand, most unhealthy behaviors begin as healthy ones. We still have to eat. To make progress in the spiral of recovery, we have to care for others. We need chemicals, such as vitamins, enzymes, and hormones, to make our bodies function. We still need to use our intellect, to spend or save our resources. At times we need to shut out or deny the full emotional impact of things over which we have truly no control. For instance, we need to put off the shock of seeing an injured person to render first aid in the moment.

The problem comes when we consistently use these patterns to change our reality. We want to replace them with something that helps rather than harms us. If we don't, we will create a vacuum or we will go back to the ways that are at least familiar.

Most of these patterns were established and practiced in our early lives, perhaps even before this particular life. Sometimes it is helpful to take a step back and look at a larger picture to give us a new perspective on our own place in the system.

Many Pagans, and others, believe in reincarnation and may also believe that when we are incarnated we have had an active part in choosing the particular place, circumstances, and people. One aspect of this belief is the idea that we have a purpose for ourselves as well as for others in this life. At least a part of our purpose is to enhance our characters, and thereby grow spiritually. If we chose these circumstances, what lessons are we trying to learn and what aspects of our characters are we trying to develop? We need to be very careful to not fall back into the "all about me" addictive trap. Bad—or good—things don't happen only to teach us a lesson or aid in our growth. Yet they can serve us if we let them.

An interesting and common use of astrology is to look at our birth, or natal, chart. We might imagine that when we were choosing our

birth, we had access to a great deal more information than we do now. It is possible that we considered what our purpose in this life is and sent ourselves a message from our prebirth and wiser selves in our birth chart. Here we might find what our hopes and fears were for ourselves.

Those hopes and fears, whatever they may have been, are not the only factors in who we are now. One of the things we can be relatively sure of is that our families have had a significant influence on us. The next section focuses on some larger patterns that occur in families.

Family Roles

In this context, I use the word *family* to mean a group of people who live together, or who choose or have close emotional ties with one another. A parent's role is to be legally or ethically responsible for a dependent's welfare. A child's role is to be dependent on another. An adult's role is to be independent. Please remember that these are simply descriptions, and not condemnations or ultimate truth.

As we look at overall patterns of how children, parents, and adults function in a family, we notice that there is a tendency to act out some common roles. A structure for family that our culture endorses has two parents and/or caregivers on the top of the hierarchy, responsible for providing all the basic needs of the children. In the past, the theory has been that one parent provides for the family's material needs, while the other parent provides for the family's emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. The adult is seen as unconnected to the larger family/society by specific relational ties.

Each person's activities become roles. One child or parent may become the one who is strong, needy or talkative. Despite these seeming role dichotomies, both sides of each coin carry the potential for addictive problems. For example, a substance abuser will often find a caretaker to help manage the mundane details of daily living.

Many Pagans find this type of family structure artificially cuts members of the family off from expressing and nurturing important parts of themselves. For example, very few Pagan parents would happily turn over the spiritual development of their children to anyone outside themselves. Some hold this as an ethical belief in radical personal responsibility. Others believe it is more basic. It is too much fun and too rewarding to be involved in the lives of our children to let someone else

reap all the benefits! Many Pagans who choose not to be in a committed relationship, or to not have children, may still consider themselves deeply connected to at least a larger self-chosen "family" by strong relational ties.

Other Pagans consciously choose to use another family structure; this may stem from issues with authority figures. As young people, they may have seen abuses of power, or experienced fear or abandonment. Many Pagans make an internal, or even a formal, vow to do things differently with their children. The culture in which we live makes this very difficult to do. Our own internal programming works against us.

Many Pagans make a strong ethical affirmation that *being* is as important as *doing*. The problem with family roles is that a person doesn't get to choose what is individually appropriate. The roles are often assigned on the basis of birth order or gender. One interesting twist is that if there are more than five or six years between children, the roles sometimes start over again, or one child is expected to fill more than one role. If there are not enough children, as in the case of an only child or a child separated from siblings by age, parentage, or location, the single child will play all the roles.

Children in a family can play five basic roles where addictive behaviors make reality uncomfortable. I emphasize *children* because all people have been children, but not all are parents or adults. Just as addictions stand between ourselves and reality, these roles stand between outward presentations and inward reality. Part of the preparation that we do to be transformed is to recognize the reality of our early lives and how it impacts us today. The five roles are

1. The Good Child, the Hero, the Savior
2. The Bad Child, the Villain, the Problem Child
3. The Forgotten Child, the Ghost, the Lost One
4. The Cute Child, the Jester, the Poor Little Thing
5. The Heir, the Substitute, the Dream Child

THE GOOD CHILD, THE HERO, THE SAVIOR

This is often the first child, the first surviving child, or the first child of either gender. The parents are proud of this child, and relatively speaking, have more time and energy to devote to this one. This one often is "spoiled" by having so much attention and so many things.

Here we tend to find those who are overresponsible and overachieving. This one tends to take on other people's burdens, often becoming the "little parent" or the "little adult" and taking care of the parents or the adults. In a situation wherein there is only one parent in the home, this child will often take the role of the other parent, or become the remaining parent's "best friend."

This child has a very deep need for the approval of others, partly because approval has often come from their actions not from their being. So they *do* lots. Outside, this one seems to have it together and often receives adult praise. Inside, the praise is never enough. The Savior Child has set an internal standard that can never be met. When parents have addiction problems, the Saviors feel hopeless, inadequate, guilty, and unworthy because they can't solve the problem. The standard—solving someone else's problems—becomes a driving force in that one's life.

The Savior provides a way for the family to say to the culture that the family really hasn't failed. If problems were really serious, we could have never produced the good student, the committed worker, the self-sacrificing parent. The Savior proves the worth of the family. That is a real burden for the Saviors if they fail, who will not only be letting themselves down (with no way to get up and no one to help them), but will be accusing and shaming the family. Saying "no" is often equated with letting people down, and so the Savior learns to say yes even when he or she means no.

THE BAD CHILD, THE VILLAIN, THE PROBLEM CHILD

By the time the second child comes along, the family is no longer fascinated by the newness of having a little one in the house. The parents already have their hands full with the first child. If the second child is unplanned, the stresses are increased. If the second child is the "wrong" gender (something that is determined by either the parents or the culture, and later by the child), a new set of dynamics comes into play. If the child is the "right" gender, there will be a tendency to superimpose the Savior and Villain role alike.

The Bad Child role is a snarl of withdrawal, defiance, stubbornness, and simply being different. Often one parent will identify this child as "the child my parents said I deserved." For example, the Bad Child may be extremely bright but get poor grades in school. This child is likely

to experiment first with substance abuse, sexuality, and unusual clothes and music.

Inside, these children don't understand why they never got a break. Everything bad seems to happen to them, or they always get caught. The older child always gets the attention, gets to go out with friends, and gets to stay up late. Others don't have to wear hand-me-downs, or live up to the Hero's reputation. The child wrestles with feelings of hurt and abandonment, rejection, and inadequacy.

When they grow up, these children are the rebels. The Bad Child, who already has such a negative label, often becomes the overt substance abuser. There is a sense that as long as the name of "bad" is mine, I might as well earn it honestly. This person draws negative attention to the family. However, this person is the most likely to remain dependent on the family for financial or emotional help after adulthood. In many cases, this problem gives the dysfunctional family a way to prove its loyalty to even this disgraceful member.

The next two roles don't have to be in a particular order. For example, if the roles in a family follow gender as well as birth-order lines, and there is at least one opposite gender, the third child of one gender will take on the Cute Child role before the Forgotten Child role.

THE FORGOTTEN CHILD, THE GHOST, THE LOST ONE

This child rejects the superhero tactics of the first child and the rebellion of the second. By this time, so much energy of the family is being spent to fix the Bad Child's problems that these children find that being a loner has its own compensations. If they don't bother anyone, no one bothers them. Rocking the boat is for the Bad Child, being the boat's captain is for the Good Child. The third child goes along with the plan, doesn't make waves, and tries to deflect attention. The more independent and less troublesome the child is, the less energy the family puts into the child. This is one child the family doesn't have to worry about.

Inside, the Forgotten Child feels alone, unimportant, uninteresting, and fearful. These children don't know how to meet their own needs for love and attention. Attention in the family is not something to be desired if it comes only with negative behavior or superior achievement.

THE CUTE CHILD, THE JESTER, THE POOR LITTLE THING

The Cute Child is just that—cute. Size and shape don't matter: it is all in the attitude. This one can be relied on for a joke, a laugh, comedy

relief. Because these children are so adorable and delicate, the family needs to protect and care for them. Sometimes these tragic figures, with their wonderful and lighthearted attitude, elicit sympathy as well as admiration. A child with a learning or physical disability may play this role in addition to another. These children are inordinately sensitive to the unspoken emotional currents in the family. This is the child who just "knows" when someone needs cheering up.

When things are tense in the family, the Cute Child can help lift the oppression by singing or dancing or doing something thoughtful or charming. The family can be assured of the love and devotion of its children by looking at how even this little one struggles to be a part of the family.

Inside, the cute children can't stand overt conflict. They are terrified, unhappy, and too attuned to the emotional and spiritual currents of the family to ever relax comfortably. Even though they are outwardly cheery and nice, they seem to be on the edge, needing to make a joke of everything.

They learn early that some things can only be said if they are "just a joke." Like the fool or the jester of medieval times, they are immune to punishment because they are so "immature." They often do the truth-telling in the family, but in the guise of humor and good fun.

THE HEIR, THE SUBSTITUTE, THE DREAM CHILD

This Dream Child role is about doing, having, or being what one or the other parent wishes they could have been or done. This is the child who becomes an actor or a teacher, or who goes to a certain school or marries into wealth, to either imitate or realize the wishes of a parent. On the overtly negative side, this role requires the child to act in specific self-harmful ways, such as getting into certain kinds of trouble or using certain addictive behaviors. This role may be acted out independently or shared by more than one of the children. Look at the following example.

Lois and Hillary were fourteen and ten when their mother died. Mom, who had left a promising career of her own to marry Dad, had stayed at home and raised the girls. Mom had told them since they were small that, since she felt ignored and unwanted as the second girl in her family, she was going to be very sure that never happened to her daughter Hillary. Mom made a great effort to be "fair," often overindulging

Hillary. She set the example of the caretaker who sacrificed herself for the family. And she placed her fears and pain about being a second child on Hillary.

After Mom passed on, Dad and Lois continued to treat Hillary as Mom had. Over the years, as the girls left home and established their own lives, it became clear that Lois was not only the "hero," but was looked to by the family to act as the competent and compliant mother. She became the Dream Child with her achievements and career. Lois did not abandon them, and she found ways to integrate both her family and her work.

Hillary acted out the role of the second child, who somehow deserved to be petted and supported by the rest of the family. Dad and Lois, faithful to Mom's spoken and unspoken wishes, helped her stay in that role. She acted not only as the Bad Child, but as one aspect of the Dream Child. Unlike Mom, she was actually taken care of.

Inside, the Dream Child feels uncomfortable, unhappy, disloyal, and confused. The Dream Child is saddled with the burden of fulfilling someone else's needs or fantasies. If she doesn't play this role, she feels disloyal and guilty. This role is overtly difficult if the real child is not physically or emotionally suited to it. For example, a son who is less than six feet tall is probably not a good match for becoming a basketball star. He garners some sympathy from others who can easily see that the expectation is unreasonable. This can clearly point to the parent as the source of the expectation, rather than the child filling the role. The Dream Child role is still difficult, but covertly so, if the child does have some natural inclinations toward it. For instance, the bright child goes to the family's preferred prep school. It is easy to get confused between the role and the self, and difficult to separate the child's preferences from the parent's.

As adults, the Dream Children are the keepers of the family pictures, memorabilia, and traditions. Why am I keeping all these ugly salt and pepper shakers? I don't need them, or want them. If I get rid of them, the family will be in an uproar because Dad collected them and they were displayed in the hallway for years. I can't give them to the others in the family because they might not take care of them and it is my job to hang on to stuff like this.

Going around this closed circle of expectations is at best frustrating. At worst, it leads back to addictive behaviors so that the conflict that can never be resolved is less immediately demanding.

For the family, the Dream Child lets the parents have a chance to correct what went wrong in their families, or to be loyal to the things that went right.

One of the legacies that we examine carefully in the sixth step is how our early lives effect our present and our future. As a result of the roles we played, and saw others play, we find ourselves one more step removed from our true selves. We become people pleasers in our adult life.

People Pleasers

We are trained by our culture and our families to please other people, even though we may lose our genuine selves in the process. We confuse the approval of others, real or imagined, with self-worth and self-esteem. We are uncomfortable when circumstances don't let us play our accustomed roles, because at least we are confident in our ability to perform them. We forget that we are not the roles themselves. We become identified with the characters and the roles we play. We find that the mask, or persona, that we wear becomes a very effective shield to deflect criticism, which we see as deadly. By focusing on others' approval, we can move away from our own conscience and ethics.

We become outwardly or inwardly defensive, angry, or withdrawn when we experience real or imagined criticism. We live with a conflicting set of rules. It is perfectly fine for me to say terrible things to myself about me and my motives and my actions. It is a very different thing for someone else to indicate any criticism. On some level it seems that there is plenty of criticism supplied by ourselves, though we also take to heart anything someone else implies about us that is negative in the slightest way. We become hypersensitive to any nuance and overreact to almost any slight. Or we become so well defended that we don't hear things that might help us.

Part of Step Six is to step back from our immediate defensiveness or total agreement when we sense criticism. We begin to see that our black-and-white thinking is not helpful. We move toward believing that our very lives are not threatened by the displeasure of others, as they might have been when we were children. We discover that we no longer have to be people pleasers to get our needs met.

Elaine's Story

Elaine had plunged into 12-Step recovery over the past three months. She called her sponsor, Camilla, every day. She cleaned out the small back porch for a private meditation area and practiced her rituals regularly. She attended the Saturday meeting faithfully, and she and two others started a Tuesday night meeting closer to her home.

Her life seemed to have turned around. The kids' grades improved, the new kitten confined her scratching to the old chair, work assignments were more satisfying, and Sandy was laughing and joking instead of moping all the time.

Then over a single week, things fell apart. Her sister Barb broke both ankles and needed Elaine's daily help just to get her family fed. "Tyga the Amazing Furball" started using the bath mat for a litter box. Hannah's grades took a dive, and she got in trouble for fighting when two bigger girls started calling her names and teasing her on the bus. Finally, the principal called and told Elaine that Dusty had just been suspended for bringing a pocketknife to school.

Instead of dealing with the issue of Dusty's suspension, Elaine focused on the pocketknife. Elaine knew she would never give him such a thing. She called Sandy at work. "Where did Dusty get that pocketknife?"

Elaine's call came at just the wrong time. Sandy, having just finished laying off a part-time employee, was not ready to deal with a parenting dilemma. Sandy vented some frustration at Elaine. "Why do you expect me to be responsible for him? He's your kid, not mine."

Elaine's anger simmered. She sent Hannah and Dusty to bed right after they ate the dinner she had cooked at Barb's house.

She called Camilla and got an answering machine. Just as she was heading out to her ritual space to try a little meditation, the doorbell rang. It was her neighbor from across the street, the paramedic.

"Elaine, I just heard on the scanner that Sandy was in an accident. They went to County General Hospital. Do you want me to drive you over?"

Stunned, Elaine thanked her friend and refused the ride. She leaned against the closed door. "Now what?" she asked herself. Why wasn't Sandy at work? It was only 8:30. Who could watch the kids? She couldn't take them because of school tomorrow. No, Dusty was sus-

pended. He could go. Hannah could sleep anywhere. She could just take them. Where were her keys? Did the car have enough gas? She should call Sandy's family, assuming their phone bill had been paid this month. Her thoughts continued to race as she bundled the kids into the car and drove the thirty miles to the hospital.

She went to the ER with the kids, identified herself, and asked to see Sandy. The attendant consulted a chart and told her that Sandy's parents were already here. They did not wish to have any other visitors. Elaine explained again that she and Sandy had been partners for almost seven years.

"I'm sorry, but Sandy's parents told us that she was not married. We have to deal with what information we have."

Stunned, Elaine turned away. She silently took the children's hands and headed out the door. She knew she wouldn't sleep tonight, and she had to be ready to go to work. Perhaps she could have a glass or two of wine, just to relax a little. As she was buckling her seat belt, a car pulled up behind her, blocking her in. Her anger exploded, then subsided in a rush as she recognized the obnoxious pink color of Camilla's car.

Incredibly relieved, she began to breathe again. Camilla and her husband, Hank, got out of the car. Elaine gave them a brief synopsis of what had happened, crying all the way through. Camilla let her finish, and she then suggested that they all go back to the house. Camilla offered to drive Elaine's car for her.

Back at the house, all three of them reassured the children and carefully tucked them in. Elaine tried to call the hospital again, but no one would give her any information. She called the police department, but they could tell her nothing. Elaine, Camilla, and Hank sat down. Elaine didn't know how to start. Camilla asked Elaine to tell her again what had just happened.

Elaine kept coming back to the idea that Sandy would feel unloved and abandoned if Elaine wasn't actually at the hospital. Camilla and Hank listened attentively. When she seemed to run out of steam, they gently encouraged Elaine to realize that she was not responsible for being unable to see Sandy at the hospital. They suggested other things, such as leaving a message on Sandy's voice mail or sending a written note. These were not satisfactory for Elaine. She wanted to help right now. Perhaps she could get the kids out of bed and have them make cards for Sandy?

It became clear that Elaine didn't know any other ways to deal with crisis but to take care of others' real or imagined needs, or to help herself by having some wine to relax.

Hank asked Elaine if she really thought that going back to her old harmful behaviors would make the situation and her feelings better. Elaine thought hard for several minutes.

"I don't know what else to do. What else can I do?"

Camilla responded. "What could you do that wouldn't harm yourself or others, and might actually help?"

Elaine walked around the room, trying to burn off some of her stress. She picked up her Tarot deck. "I did a Step Six reading yesterday, but it didn't make much sense then. I think I understand it better now." As she spoke, she laid out the cards for them all to see.

The Temperance card was in the "harmful behaviors" position, the 4 of Wands in the "ethical coping skills" position, and the Wheel of Fortune going from past to future was in the "how to replace it" position.

Slowly she started to explain. "It seems I've been waiting around for something to happen, trying to keep things balanced and calm all by myself. It's just like you said. I try to take care of everyone else, hoping someone will take care of me. If they don't, I put on a cheerful, calm face and wait. The two cups in the picture really speaks to me. I used to pour the cup of wine over the cup of my emotions to drown them out. That Four of Wands tells me that I need to relax, and stop trying to do it all myself. I need to quit trying to make everyone else okay and work on being okay myself.

"The Wheel is pointing to the past. It's telling me to let other people experience their own lives. I've tried to turn the Wheel myself. And

ELAINE'S STEP SIX READING

here it's turned on its own. It seems like it was spinning too fast today." She began to cry again, but continued with the difficult thoughts. "Things don't revolve around me. I can't fix everything and everyone. Everyone has to deal with his or her own fortune."

Camilla and Hank hugged Elaine. They praised her for being able to put these thoughts and emotions into words at a time of stress. As they were about to leave, Elaine hesitantly asked if one or both of them would stay overnight and get up with the children in the morning. She just didn't want to sleep alone in the house tonight, and she didn't want to take out her anxiety on the kids as she had done that morning a few months earlier. Hank and Camilla discussed it, but neither felt free to stay. They commended Elaine for asking, but both turned her down.

Camilla reminded Elaine that she didn't have to wait for things to be better to take care of herself. After they left, Elaine gathered up a few pillows and a sleeping bag and headed for Hannah's room, where there was a comfortable recliner. While her sleep was not the best, she did manage to doze on and off, comforted by the soft breathing of her daughter.

The Divine Presence

It is easiest to go back to old patterns in the midst of crisis. We experience the pressure of the "now," and are very uncomfortable with the feelings we are having. Our harmful behaviors are the ones we know best. Crisis by its very nature puts us on some version of automatic pilot because we simply don't have the time and ability to respond in a considered and appropriate manner. Addictions are habits, and after a while, seem the easiest ways to manage crisis. Twelve-step recovery programs refer to addictive behaviors as cunning, baffling, and powerful. After we are hooked, or at least established in a pattern, we can find ourselves creating a crisis so we have an excuse to use our favorite process or substance. We eventually become unable to tell the crisis from the addiction.

One value of the Sixth Step is that we can take the time to consider what we have learned. We can make careful, considered decisions and get help from others and the Divine while making them.

Engaging the Adventurous Seeker in ourselves and our Deities, we can look at change as a positive experience. We can try out ethical

coping skills, or learn about what others have done. We can imagine situations in which we would normally use our old harmful behaviors, then imagine how things would be different. We can choose to allow fears about them to surface, then begin to plan changes that address them in a helpful, not harmful way.

The Accepting Guardian reminds us that the harmful patterns at one time served us and were the best we could do at the time. We can honor our old skills and learn new and ethical ones. With compassion and directness, we can address the shame and guilt from our pasts that keep us from learning.

Our Literal Guide can help us spot fuzzy thinking. To say that we want to replace a mean and angry response with being "nicer" is not enough. We might as an ultimate goal respond appropriately to stressful situations, but getting there is a different story. The Literal Guide deals with the here and now, as well as the future.

Our Literal Guide might ask us where the anger came from in the first place. Our Literal Guide does not judge us or others for being angry. Anger is nothing more and nothing less than a signal that something is wrong. That anger itself is neutral, not bad or good, is a difficult concept to understand. We are very used to seeing anger as harmful. Perhaps we have experienced others' anger, or our own, as leading to painful, shaming, or guilt-ridden results. When we or others deny the simple fact of anger, we are throwing out an important part of the data that we need to make good decisions.

Anger

We may think of anger as a traffic light. Traffic lights are placed at intersections where unrestricted traffic flow could cause harm. The traffic light, or anger, is not good or bad. It is just a way of saying that there is a problem. With this visualization in place, we can imagine that there are three types of anger, corresponding to the colors of the lights.

Green anger is usually directed at ourselves. We are angry when we forget to pick up the dry cleaning. We are angry if we didn't realize we already had an appointment on Thursday. On a deeper level, we may be angry that an old pattern of spending too much time at work has crept back into our lives. We are especially upset if we *know* the prob-

lem has been a problem in the past, but we have fallen back, or relapsed into the behavior.

Green anger simply points out that something is wrong and that we have the ability to change it because we can change ourselves. We can keep better track of our appointments and our dry cleaning. We can be vigilant when it comes to making excuses to buy this or that. We can simply not have desserts in the house. This kind of anger can be very helpful. We can use the energy we feel from the green anger to make changes. We need to be careful, because we can often mistake rage or depression for anger with ourselves. If there is a deep emotional response, rather than simple irritation, then it probably isn't green anger.

Yellow anger is about caution. We get a signal that something is wrong when someone we barely know sends us a dozen roses. We may love the roses. We may feel uplifted and happy when they are delivered. On some level, we may be angry that a nodding acquaintance would place such a burden on us with such an expensive, message-laden gift. We therefore temper our response, perhaps asking directly why the person sent the flowers. We may have an angry response when a loved one who has been "in the doghouse" sends the dozen roses. Here we recognize the third stage of the addiction cycle, the honeymoon or flight into health. The roses may be an attempt by our loved one to smooth things over. Our anger signals caution. Roses, or apologies, without behavioral and spiritual changes that go to the core of the problem, will not solve the problem.

Red anger is about stopping; it demands immediate action. We see danger or a problem and we call a halt. We put on the brakes at an intersection when the light is red. We cancel our credit card if we discover unauthorized use. We remove our child from that day care center if we find he has been left unsupervised.

The anger itself is not the problem, or the solution. The choices we make about what we do or do not do are what counts.

In addressing this question of anger, we are encouraged to honor our feelings and discover what is wrong. As we figure that out, we can choose what to do about it. Our Literal Guide might ask us if "being nice" is a part of our addictive pattern that allows us to hide our true selves. If so, the question continues, "What is a more ethical thing for us to do?" Might we want to take a few moments to think before we react? Would saying "I'm really angry now, and I need some time" be a

move in the right direction? What exact behaviors, specific actions, and statements are going to be replaced with what other behaviors?

Phil's Story

Phil was still pretty skeptical about this Pagan stuff. He knew that he needed some kind of spirituality in his life, but the rhymes, rituals, and Tarot readings seemed so simplistic. He had always seen himself as too sophisticated to bother with such small stuff.

He liked Sean and some others he had met at the Pagan groups. He didn't really mind doing this stuff as others were doing it, and they were very open about the benefits. The worst that would happen is that he would make a fool of himself, and he had done that often enough in service to his addictions. He still shook his head about the time he almost stuck his hand in a dirty public toilet to retrieve the last cigarette that had fallen out of his pocket. No, he could afford to look like a fool. And besides, he really had felt better emotionally since he began to bring a fresh flower to his altar during the week. He came to realize how much he looked forward to simply connecting with the Divine Presence and the world around him in that quiet time.

Sean was working on the Step Six questions and asked Phil for some help. As Phil helped Sean, he began to answer the questions for himself. It became clear pretty quickly that Phil had acted out the role of both the Bad Child and the Cute Child. His brother Carl had taken the Savior role. They both did some of the Dream Child role, acting out their father's desire to be stable in the business world as well as have a life without responsibilities. Phil recognized that he needed to leave behind being the one to feel sorry for. He knew that he could choose to be more responsible with his resources, but he didn't know how to change except to follow rules. As the Rebel, he hated rules. He realized that the whole persona, or mask, of the role he had been acting was still a way of pleasing other people, though of a topsy-turvy kind.

Phil decided to do the ritual for Step 6 (see *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows* at the end of the book) using real objects. He gathered together a Halloween pirate's mask to represent his Rebel self, a clay flowerpot, a bag of potting soil, and some rocks from an old fish tank. As he did the ritual, he discovered that the pirate's mask was too large for the pot. He rolled up the mask and tried to cover it with the potting soil, but

the top still stuck out. After he finished, he decided that he would need to do the ritual again. This time he bought a huge clay pot and a saucer, and got more soil, some rainwater, and a tea light candle. He did the ritual again, placing the mask in the larger pot. He blew on the mask to symbolize the East, placed the candle in the pot for the South, and poured water over it for the West. Phil really enjoyed covering it all with dirt. It seemed to him that he was not just touching the surface, but really getting at some of the deep parts of his soul.

He was still not convinced that a pot of dirt with a pirate mask sitting on a TV tray—with a pink rose in a plastic vase beside it—in his garage would do him any good in the long run, but it didn't hurt anything.

Step Six Summary

The Sixth Step is about preparation for real change. In the Recovery Spiral, we revisit our issues and our challenges again and again, and we learn new and more ethical ways to live. We realize how important taking the time to understand and prepare can be to make way for real transformation. A quick wrinkle of the nose, or wave of the magic wand, returns as much benefit as the energy we've put into it.

Step Seven

Step Seven also seems very simple. After we have done our preparation, we want the changes we have envisioned, and planned for, to happen. We cannot do this alone, any more than we could do Steps Three or Five alone. We cannot permanently transform ourselves in a helpful way by our will alone. The transformations that we temporarily accomplished through our active addictions were harmful. Now we are seeking transformation again. This time we ask for—and receive—the help of the Divine. Step Seven says:

Asked the Divine to transform us, giving us rebirth in our lives.

The transformation we want, for which we have spent so much time and energy preparing, relates to character and spirit. Our actions will show the transformation, but they are not the transformation.

In my personal and professional experience I have never seen a successful and lasting change unless something other than ourselves, which we are calling the Divine Presence, does magic within us that is beyond our abilities. The only way for that magic to happen is for us to ask. Assumptions, preparations, and willpower will not accomplish the final change, though they are often very important in facilitating and consolidating the change. The change, the transformation, and the rebirth we seek require us to allow and trust that the Divine will do what we cannot do for ourselves. All the work on the spiral of recovery is to help us be in a position both to ask and to receive this gift.

Phil's Story

Phil had a great deal of trouble with this notion. He was okay with Nature, represented by his fresh flower. He was also willing to go along with the clay-pot-and-mask thing. The idea of a Divine Presence that magically zapped him to bring transformation bothered him enormously. He had no confidence that such a thing was possible, or probable. And what would he be left with if he asked for such help and nothing happened?

He spent a couple of months listening to other people who had tried the Step Seven ritual. One thing he did sort out was the difference between physical and spiritual change. He realized that doing magic to take the calories out of banana cream pie was working against, rather than with, natural, mundane circumstances. The appropriate mundane answer to an excess of calories was to not eat the pie, rather than doing a spell to change its nature. In the dialogue with others, he came to see that the proper province of spirituality was in transformation of the nonmundane aspects of life. This transformation could eventually be manifested in the mundane world, but had to begin inside rather than outside. Step Seven's ritual was a great deal more about an inward change first, then the outward change. He was confused at first, because so much of the first six steps had been about changing his behavior, thoughts, and attitudes. He believed he had worked really hard at discovering his own patterns, and he was proud of what he had accomplished. He asked Sean about it.

"Why should I bother with this? It's not like I've never done this. Remember, I've been in the programs for years."

"Yeah," Sean replied, "but has it worked?"

"Not really before. Why would this time be different? Anyway, I feel like I've *been* transformed already."

"I don't know that it will be any different. If you have already been transformed, what's the problem? If you haven't, what will it hurt?"

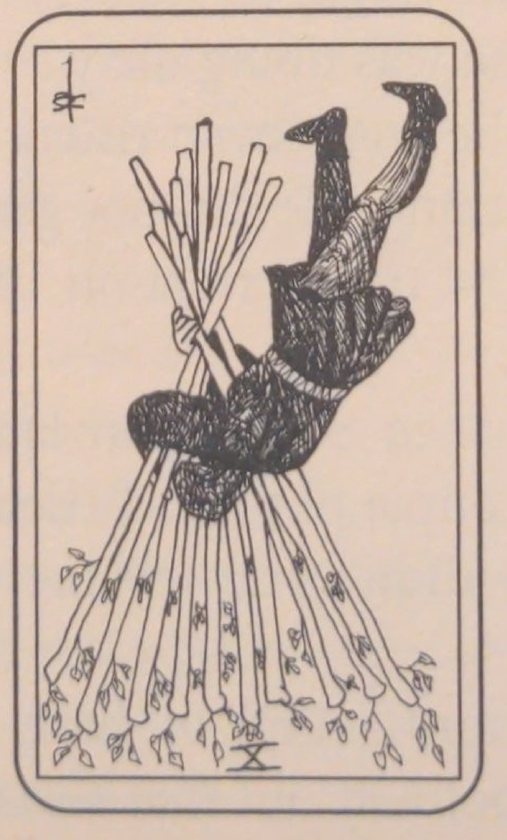
Phil's Step Seven reading was pretty clear to him. He was pleased to notice that the first three cards matched their directions—Swords in the East, Wand in the South, and Cups in the West. He felt good about the work he had done. The Sun card in the North and the wish card in the Spirit were very encouraging. Phil understood that the 7 of Swords in the East, the place of mental activity, reminded him that his mind could still be full of the "stinking thinking" that leads to arrogance and dishonor. He needed to be careful about relying too heavily on reason alone. In the South, the reversed 10 of Wands, the Codependency card, affirmed that he was doing a good job of putting down other people's burdens and choosing a path based on true growth. The 3 of Cups, had come up for him in the advice position of his Step Four reading, encouraging him to begin to trust rather than fear. Here in the West, the place of emotions, the reversal indicated that he had indeed taken the advice and put aside some of his reservations about deeper connections with others. In the North, the place of practical reality, the Sun card spoke to him about the positive and creative qualities of the changes he had made in his daily life. The wish card, the 9 of Cups, in the place of the Spirit, seemed to say that what he wished for would happen. Since this reading was about his wish to be transformed from within, he decided that he might as well try it, though the other cards seemed to indicate that he was doing okay.

Reluctantly, Phil did the Step Seven ritual. As he went to each of the quarters, he didn't get a thing. He did not get images, sounds, feelings, or smells. He did ask for transformation, but didn't sense anything at all.

When he reported this to Sean, Sean laughed. "You too? I didn't sense anything the first couple of times I tried it either."

"Hey, I'm upset. Why didn't you tell me you didn't get anything?" asked Phil.

Sean talked about wanting Phil to have his own experience, not someone else's. And he pointed out that something really had changed in Phil. He had identified a feeling, and he spoke about it directly to Sean. This was a very different behavior pattern.



PHIL'S STEP SEVEN READING

"Yeah, you're right. Something did change, even though I didn't think anything happened."

Without being conscious of it, Phil used three aspects of himself and the Divine Presence in working on Step Seven.

Divine Presence

The Seeker we work with in this step is Instinctive. We follow our psychic noses and allow our senses to lead us. We have no need to please others in this step, nor do we need to use our skills as questioning authorities. The work that we have already done allows this part of us to work without being restrained or hindered.

The Structuring Guardian keeps a careful eye on the ethics of what we do and how it affects the world around us. Because we want to seek safely, we rely on a desire to follow our honor and our truth within a framework we have built.

The Abstract Guide within us looks beyond the simple facts to the deeper meanings. Our efforts to look truthfully and realistically, as well as compassionately and carefully, at ourselves and our world serve us here. Our intuition can make connections that we cannot make using our everyday skills.

Cynthia's Story

Before I began to write this book, I found myself in the middle of a painful and disturbing situation. As time went on, I realized that the problem was getting worse and not better. I did a Step Four inventory and realized that I was very upset. In the inventory, I noticed that I had felt the same kinds of feelings in the past—in school and in my professional life. In addition, I saw that I was projecting my own feelings from the past disappointments of betrayal, rejection, inability to communicate, and overwork onto "Gertrude," the other person in this little drama. I imagined that Gertrude felt all those terrible feelings I had felt. The scholastic and professional people had not responded to my questions. I saw a parallel because I was not responding to her seemingly reasonable questions. I knew instinctively that the questions were inappropriate, personal, and accusatory. I did not have the words for

that until after I did some of my work. I was able to see the possibility that Gertrude was honestly baffled and that the questions were genuine. I was afraid Gertrude was being abused by me because I wouldn't respond. I absolutely did not, and do not, want to abuse anyone.

I also realized that Gertrude's insanity mirrored the insanity of the authority figures in my past. She refused to take my words and deeds seriously and did lots of subtle and overt manipulative things to change me. Because her behavior was both like mine—with the questions—and like the authority figures'—trying to change me for their own benefit—both sides of my issues were activated.

So I asked myself some questions: Who excited the same responses in me? First, I listed a few names associated with these feelings. I asked what they had in common. They were all bright, personable, strong, talented, and fun to be with.

"What else?" I asked myself. In my perspective, all had taken financial advantage of me. I knew that I was at fault as well, but my emotional reaction was to blame them, not myself. All had insisted on repeating stories about themselves or others, over and over, while editing to match their current mind-set or needs. All kept messing with my reality. They ignored me, interrupted me, and criticized me. They denied simple details of basic interactions. They suffered selective memory loss when it was to their benefit. They denied that they had any sort of problem. In short, they behaved like active addicts.

I noticed that, like the others, Gertrude was trying to use guilt to persuade me to do and be some particular things. Somehow, if I had any shortcomings, she was not obligated to behave in a civil, courteous, or reasonable manner. Again, this is basic active addict behavior. I could see progress in myself in dealing with this kind of insanity, but I was revisiting my old problems in dealing with the tenacity of an addict's behavior.

Next, I made a list of past romantic partners who seemed to bring up those feelings, and I asked the same questions. I got the same answers. I could see that I had made more progress in choosing appropriate partners than in choosing friends. My most recent romantic relationships have been healthy. I remembered an interaction from a few years ago. A friend, and now a sober covenmate, asked me whether I thought he was an alcoholic. I answered without hesitation that I thought so. He began to challenge me and to defend himself. I laughed and told him

that I had made that call based on the fact that I was sexually attracted to him. He was very surprised. I explained that I know myself well enough that if I am sexually or romantically attracted to someone, that person is likely to have an addiction problem, probably with substances. This is about me and my issues, not about the other person. He was able to hear this because I was not condemning him. I was simply being emotionally honest with him and myself. Shortly after our discussion, he quit drinking and began doing the hard work of internal change. His dedication and his own emotional honesty have helped him stay sober and grow since then.

I've learned to check out a potential romantic partner's awareness of addictive issues and progression in recovery work. In other words, it is easier for me to spot an addict when I'm romantically or sexually attracted than it is for me to spot such patterns in a friend or business associate. No matter how powerful the attraction, I've learned to make more rational decisions. I've even established platonic friendships with past romantic partners who are doing the internal work. This has been a joyous part of my recovery. So, good for me. Good job so far.

So why was I not sleeping? Why was I obsessing about Gertrude? Midnight. 1 A.M. 2 A.M. "All right, what is going on?" I asked myself. "Why am I awake after knowing I am exhausted?" Then I got an idea. Perhaps a visit to my inner circle would help. I really didn't want to. I nearly changed my mind and got some milk and cookies, or did some light reading.

In meditation, I surveyed my inner circle, a place long familiar to me. No lights were on, which was a bit unusual. So I greeted the East in my usual manner (which is a bow). Light came up very slightly, a very tentative almost-sunrise. A tall figure in a dull black hooded robe, with face obscured and a bony, almost skeletal hand and arm, appeared.

"So," said the figure, "do you really want to know what is going on?"

Internally I said "probably not," but I realized that I had asked for help so I squeaked out "Yes, please."

"Part of this you chose. You chose to incarnate in a body. You chose a creative intelligence. You chose a path of developing your individual character. You also chose to be lonely, having much internal work to do. Your problem is partly that you deal with your intellectual, spiritual, and creative loneliness by projecting how *you* respond onto others, and not allowing them the freedom to respond as themselves.

"A part of your path is that you are able to see many possibilities. Your problem is that you spend so much time playing with the possibilities that you fail to draw and keep simple boundaries. You often assume that you have failed to communicate or that you are wrong. Sometimes that's true. Sometimes you've done your part and refuse to accept that another being either can't or doesn't see it your way. Your experience gives the ability to be very compassionate and forgiving. Your problem is that you would rather make a new start than deal with the old stuff. You'd rather just let it go away on its own, which it won't do."

With a bit less than enthusiasm, I turned to the South. The gaunt figure, in a desert backdrop with a brilliant and harsh sun, was robed and hooded in muted red ocher. Wasting no words, the figure pointed at me and said:

"You know perfectly well what your path is. You're always going down side trails, chasing someone else's path rather than walking yours. That's their path, not yours. Follow your own path."

Okay, then. Not looking forward to my next "adventure," I greeted the West. I was met with a dark, turbulent, roiling sea, with a stormy sky, crashing breakers and a cold spray. The figure was dressed in a silvery blue-gray. Her face was exposed, and her long hair was blown by the restless winds.

"I am the keeper of the cauldron of regeneration and rebirth, which you see before you. I am the mother of all living, but to be renewed you must go willingly and deeply into my realm.

"Your problem is ethics. You have not finished dealing with authority issues. You are harming yourself and others. You have much work to do, and if you do not do it, I cannot help you."

Finally, I turned to the North. There were small, lumpish figures in gray hooded cloaks in front of a rocky ledge and the opening of a cave was clearly visible.

"We've given you a gift, and you have been ignoring and abusing it. We've given you your body and we have to take extreme measures to even get your attention. What are you doing awake at this hour, anyway? Your body is reliable and is a gift from us. Respect it."

Finally, I focused on the Center. Nothing. As a counselor, I knew that this meant I needed to listen very carefully. In the silence, which seemed like a gift in itself, I heard an old song with the words "different drum." The message seemed to be about my relationship to Gertrude. It said

"She and I travel to the beat of a different drum" and this is simply how it is. She and I would both do better if we lived without each other. We were simply walking two different paths. I could and should not try to travel her path, nor could or should she travel mine.

I became quieter and realized that I had not done what I came to do. I had gotten a great deal of information and insight, but I was still not changed. I finally asked the Deities in my inner circle to transform me. I confessed that I had tried unsuccessfully to change myself in the past. I could change for a week, a month, or a year. I realized that lasting change, true transformation and rebirth, was something I had to ask for. I told the Deities that unless they chose to transform me, I would continue to fall into the same problems. I echoed the Serenity Prayer in my petition. I accepted that I could not change my true self, any more than I could change Gertrude. I was willing to change the things I could about my behavior and my choices, and to continue to make those changes whether or not my heart, my true self, changed.

I knew that I had done all I could do. As is possible in the world of the spirit, I imagined taking my heart out of my chest and placing it on the central altar. I asked again that my heart be changed, and said that I could not do it myself.

I didn't see any outward changes at first. As I continued to look at my heart on the altar, I noticed that the color changed slowly to a more vibrant and glowing red. It seemed warmer and more alive.

I really didn't know if I should pick it up and put it back, or if I should leave it on the altar.

I told the Deities that I didn't know what to do, so I told them to do with my heart as they willed. After a moment, I saw strong hands pull a squirming black thing out of my heart. Another pair of hands put something small and filled with light back in, then covered it up gently, like snuggling a baby into a blanket. Then my heart whooshed back into my chest. I felt finished.

As I prepared to leave my inner circle, I asked for specific practical suggestions from the Ladies of the Directions.

The North emphasized eating properly, exercising, resting, natural rhythm, and setting and maintaining a schedule that was both goal oriented and flexible.

The West relayed that I was to fully record my experiences with authority figures and process it using the 12 Steps. In other words, they sent me back to the beginning, reinforcing that recovery is a spiral.

The South told me to focus on my responsibilities, to follow my path of creativity and magic and to quit trying to follow everyone else's path. I sensed that there was some very specific task that they wanted me to undertake.

After all these challenging communications, I have to admit that I was not looking forward to practical advice from the East. When I turned to face the East, I was surprised. Within my inner landscape is something that looks rather like a medieval dressed stone cloister, set in a very sparse landscape. There is a small garden with a little stone bench inside, which I use when I need to contemplate.

Sitting on the bench in the little sunlit garden was the figure from the East, with her hood thrown back and her sleeves pushed up and a big smile on her face, the face of a trusted aunt inviting a motherly hug.

"Come on in and sit by me," she said, gesturing with her hands wide open to show her welcome.

I sat at her feet and put my head in her lap. She stroked my hair and made soft, soothing noises while I cried and until I relaxed.

"You don't have to be so old, and so wise, little one. I'm much, much older than you and much, much wiser. Relax, and let me do my work. I will, though it may not always be as you see fit. You need to enjoy your time in this lovely life, and bring light, joy, and fun into your own life. I've matched you with some very special souls, and that means you do not have to be lonely. Walk in love."

I ended the meditation in my usual way, and went almost immediately to sleep.

I had asked for rebirth and transformation. I believe it happened. I was given some tasks to do to suit me for that new life. I was given the transformation of tears, honesty, and insight, as well as the magic that only the Divine can provide. My rebirth is still happening, and in my recovery it will continue to happen.

Writing this book is a part of my recovery. It seems to be at least a part of the task that I need to do. I know that I need to express my experience, strength, struggles, and hope both to myself and to others. I also know that the transformation in my heart is about a transformation in my character.

Dante's Hell

When I was in college, we studied part of a long poem called *The Inferno*. Dante, the author, in this part of the work, describes a medieval

hell, where those guilty of any of the seven deadly sins are placed for punishment. What still speaks to me about this work is the idea that character traits, when allowed to devour the spirit, condemn us to our own personal hell.

Dante's catalog of the seven deadly sins sounds a bit strange to our ears in this century. Addictions are nothing new, and Dante's list sounds eerily like a list of twelve-step recovery programs. He lists sloth, lust, avarice, wrath, pride, envy, and gluttony as the basic sins. We consider the harmful aspects of ourselves that will lead us back into the hell of addiction and find our list to be similar to Dante's, though the words are different. He speaks of lust and we speak of sex addicts. He talks about avarice and we talk about being money drunk. Rage-aholics and the domestically violent are wrathful people. Gluttony becomes a catch-all to cover any compulsive food behaviors or any substance addiction.

The point here is that addictions are not an invention of the past few decades. One of the changes that we have made since medieval times is to see addictions not as a moral failing, like sins, but as part of a disease process about which we can make choices. Nonetheless, the emotional impact of the metaphoric image of hell carries a truth that goes beyond words, describing our genuine experience.

Step Seven Summary

Active addictions are surely a personal hell. The spiral of recovery is a way to transform our characters so that we are free of that hell, no longer enslaved to harm.

In the context of harm to self and others, we might list the spirit-killers as self-pity, resentment, jealousy, dishonesty, denial, codependence, and isolation.

The transformation that we seek is to willingness, gratitude, acceptance, courage, serenity, honesty, and balance.

Step Seven can be the result of long gestation. The labor and delivery can be painful and difficult. The growth and transformation are worth it.

USING FREEDOM:

The Principle of Giving and Receiving

Steps Eight and Nine, and Step Ten—Transition

Steps One and Two placed us on an equal footing with others and our world. Steps Three, Four, and Five helped us discover the deep spiritual and practical connections between ourselves and our world so that we may make decisions while being conscious of and considerate of others. Steps Six and Seven moved us into a closer emotional relationship with ourselves and the Divine as we live our new lives. In Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten our goal is to clean up debts we owe from our pasts to ourselves, to others, and to our world. We cannot do this unless we learn how to give and to receive with gratitude and without resentment.

To honor the North, the place of practical and mundane reality, we both *freely give and freely receive*. It is easier to give freely than to receive freely. This means that in a relationship neither of us owes the other. What we do, we do because we choose. There are no IOUs between us.

When we are in our active addictions, we keep mental scorecards. If we build up enough points, we can somehow justify placing something between a too-intense reality and ourselves. If someone "owes" us, we can use that as an excuse to serve our addictions. For example, if someone is rude to me, the world owes me something nice, and I may translate that as permission to stay up all night watching videos. When we

are actively participating in our addictions, we cannot freely give at all because we have to serve our addiction first. We are not truly free in any sense.

We are coming to understand our role in our own problems. We've looked at our behaviors and our attitudes. We may sincerely want to change—we've done a lot of internal and spiritual work; we've reached out to others and to the Divine Presence. We are learning to cope with difficulties. Now it's time to pay our debts. We have learned that we cannot consider our phone bill paid if we have used the same money to pay the rent, even if we really *want* to pay the phone bill. We cannot freely give away something that is not ours to give. Our pasts still have a claim on us, whether we consider them behind us or not.

Step Eight

By now, we are coming to understand that writing things down, or recording them in some other way, gives them a reality that helps us focus our attention and our memory. We have found that all the good intentions we can muster are useless without action. We have found that we take action most effectively when we have a plan. Step Eight, like Step Four, is a written list. The Step Eight list begins with anyone or anything mentioned on the Step Four list. As we have worked on Steps Five, Six, and Seven and become more aware of ourselves, others, and the world around us, the list grows.

In this written list, we don't worry about priorities, or even practicality. We are just cataloging what needs attention. We are considering, not committing. We may be surprised at the list we assemble. Things we thought were over and done with may still need amends. We may be tempted to "let sleeping dogs lie." The problem is that all those sleeping dogs awaken eventually, and they are usually grumpy.

Step Eight states:

> *Made a list of all beings we had harmed, beginning with ourselves and including our world, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

This program of recovery is not simply about the transformation of our personal characters, though that is necessary. It is about the renewal of our hopes, our dreams, and our relationships. We cannot begin to

experience this renewal until we realize that we have done harm and may still be doing harm. In the process of personal transformation, we have the tools to change how we relate to the world, to others, and to ourselves. One way to start is by simply not continuing to use the addictive chemical or process.

In the spiral of recovery, we revisit the tough places again and in new ways. We discover a great deal about what we have done and want to do. In going around the second, third, or tenth time, we are not surprised to find some of the same patterns and issues coming up over and over. We bring to each repetition stronger, more ethical coping skills so that we don't have to have the same results.

Each time we do this work honestly and with intention, we learn about ways that others, the Divine Presence, and our world touch the core of our being. This is the heart of the transformation.

Disease

These steps are a slow awakening. We've had these illnesses for so long, we've almost forgotten we are sick. We imagined that our sadness, guilt, depression, or hopelessness was simply a part of how life was. Our symptoms might get a little better for a while. We couldn't trust that any positive change was permanent. Now, with some time, sweat, tears, and honesty behind us, we can hold on firmly to the hope that our illness, though it will always be with us, can go into remission. Things can and will change, and we are an important part of choosing the direction.

A lot of discussion revolves around whether addictions are really diseases, and whether or not only some are "real" diseases. In one sense, it doesn't matter at all. Shopping, sugar, pulling hair, alcohol, taking care of others, playing computer games, eating, or not eating are all normal behaviors. The problem comes when they are used to stand between ourselves and reality on a regular basis. Twelve-step recovery can give us the tools to face reality in a way that does not harm ourselves or others. If I look, I might find a thousand opinions that say that I'm not really addicted. Yet if I view my behavior as an addiction, and twelve-step recovery works for me, I really don't care. I'm happier, healthier, and saner, and my world is a better place.

Here is a clinical definition. A disease is a *pathological* (or harmful)

condition or process in an organism with *characteristic symptoms* (not all of which need to be present for diagnosis), *specific causes* (known or unknown), *predictable progression*, and *determinable outcome*. There are many kinds of diseases, some of which share symptoms with other diseases. A cold, a sinus infection, and the flu can all feature a runny nose. We can usually recognize mumps, measles, and chicken pox by their physical symptoms. Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, and depression are a bit more difficult to spot. Sometimes, it is only after the diagnosis is made that we can look back and see the disease progression.

All diseases have symptoms, whether they are immediately evident to an observer or to the person with the disease. I am going to use a generally recognized disease as a metaphor for the disease of addictions. In early Type II diabetes, the affected person most likely notices internal responses such as increased thirst and urination, exaggerated focus on foods, kidney or eye problems, mental confusion, and increased food intake without weight gain. Observers can see wounds that don't heal well and experience the person as more irritable. The patient or others might notice the effect of specific foods on the person in emotional terms. It is not necessary to have all these symptoms to be a diabetic, and other symptoms are not listed here.

The cause of diabetes may be genetic, or secondary to such other aspects as medication to treat lupus or life circumstances. Specific behaviors can make it worse. Problems increase as the disease progresses. Treatment is ongoing, not a one-time thing. Nontreatment, or lapses in treatment, cause progressive deterioration and, with lack of appropriate self-care, eventually death. If treated appropriately for the individual, the symptoms can go into full or partial remission. Because diabetes is life-threatening, it is considered to be a primary disease. It is prevalent, and it is treatable. It won't go away. Its progression as a disease is definable, and untreated it will go from bad to worse. It can be both long-term (chronic) and have crises (acute).

Except for the symptoms, the disease process of diabetes is *exactly* like addiction. In addiction, the affected person is most likely to notice internal responses. There may be increased anxiety about the process or the substance, a greater need to defend or hide aspects of the self, mental confusion, need for more of the substance or process to get the same change in attitude and emotion. A person with an addiction may

experience increased fear, resentment, guilt, or shame. The addict or others can see that the person continues to be active in the addiction despite negative consequences, and notices changes in tolerance, control, and memory. Either might notice the effect of specific activities on the person. Like diabetes, it is not necessary to have all these symptoms to be an addict, and other symptoms are not listed here.

The cause of addiction may be genetic, or secondary to other aspects, such as medication or life circumstances. Specific behaviors make it worse. Problems increase as the disease progresses. Treatment is ongoing, not a one-time thing. Nontreatment, or lapses in treatment, cause progressive deterioration and, with lack of appropriate self-care, eventually death. If treated appropriately for the individual, the symptoms can go into full or partial remission. Because addiction is life-threatening, it is considered to be a primary disease. It is prevalent, and it is treatable. It won't go away. Without appropriate treatment, it becomes progressively worse. It can be both long-term (chronic) and have crises (acute).

As with any disease, the sooner it is caught and treated, the better the potential for recovery. Sometimes we do not get the early attention we need to recover, or with later treatment we may make only a partial recovery. It is critical to repair as much damage as possible from the past progress of the disease. Areas left untreated are breeding grounds for more problems. For instance, a diabetic cannot simply ignore an unhealed wound in the body. An addict cannot simply ignore an unhealed emotional or spiritual wound.

Taking Step Eight

Step Eight involves making a list, a full accounting to ourselves. We have no reason to make this a short list. We list things we have done and things we have failed to do that need to be set right. The list includes specific people and incidents. We are interested in gathering up all the possibilities. We are coming to understand that amends that heal our old wounds are a privilege, a way to deepen our growth and recovery. Listing amends is not an exercise in guilt, shame, or misery. It is a step toward healing.

Looking at the things for which we sought Divine help in Step Seven, we add to the list that began with our list from Step Four. Since we

asked for help, we put ourselves on the list. We put ourselves on our list to recognize that we have harmed ourselves or denied ourselves healing.

We ask whether we are really willing to make amends to ourselves. For example, is an appropriate amend for me to do some regular exercise? What does my physician say? What about using a gym or a workout tape? Do I want to walk the dog every day? I know that on days I don't do my exercise, I don't feel as happy over the next couple of days. If I miss it too many times, I feel depressed. How willing am I to make this kind of amend to myself? Might I be more willing to make a different kind of amend? What will truly help me repair the damage I've caused to myself?

When I tackled my problems with Gertrude, I made such a list, and I included Gertrude. I realized what a stumbling block I had placed in front of myself by holding her accountable to me financially. One addiction that I struggle with constantly is being a "money drunk." I have learned that my spending, debt, and saving patterns are something that stands between me and reality. When I find myself spending money I don't have, I become more and more agitated with what people "owe" me. I give energy to my resentment and allow myself to live in a world that would be better "if only" someone else would change. I don't clean up my side of the street—in this case, being financially responsible by spending only what I have appropriately and actually available—because someone else's side should be cleaned up first.

One amend that I listed, both for her and for myself, was to let go of her debt to me, and to put that in writing. This was something I could freely give. I did not need the money to survive, and I realized that her debt tied us together in an unhealthy way. By making as thorough a list as we can at this time, we prepare ourselves to open our hearts and our hands, and to receive what is offered to us.

Divine Presence

As we seek appropriate amends, we find that the Divine can be of great help to us. As the Social Seeker, we can open ourselves and learn about our interactions with others. We may well discover that something that seemed "harmless" was actually the cause of great pain. For example, we may have learned from our family that we were expected to get the

very best grades we could. In and of itself, this is an excellent idea. As we look at how we went about meeting that expectation, we may discover that we owe amends to ourselves for never being able to enjoy an accomplishment. We may find we owe amends to our kids because we were not satisfied unless they brought home an A. Finally, we may owe amends to our partner, who ate a lot of dinners alone while we spent way too much time making the company newsletter just perfect. A changed attitude, an apology, and simple gestures may help us make real amends.

Our Structuring Guardian keeps us honest about what we have done and haven't done. We can discover how we have affected others and our world by asking and observing. While it is true that we "should" do our best, sometimes it is helpful to examine our assumptions. We may readjust what we consider appropriate for our efforts in one area of our lives, like editing the company newsletter, so that we can have the time for top priorities like building a closer relationship with people who are important to us.

Our Literal Guide can help us pay attention to ourselves in a healthy way. For instance, by continuing to get all A's in life, we may have shorted ourselves on sleep, and used cookies and coffee to keep us awake in service to our harmful assumptions.

The last time we saw Elaine, she was struggling to replace old coping mechanisms with healthier ones in a time of crisis. Next, we'll see how Elaine coped as the stresses in her life moved from crisis to a longer-term situation.

Elaine's Story

Elaine had a rough couple of months. Sandy was still in a rehabilitation facility after the accident, and it looked like the employer was going to fight the disability claim. It turned out that Sandy had been laid off just after Elaine's call. That explained why she was on the road instead of at work.

Sandy's extended recovery required everyone in Elaine's world to make changes. Elaine arranged for the kids to go next door for twenty minutes on school mornings to wait for the bus. This gave her a vital ten minutes alone to finish her makeup or read the paper. On Friday nights, Barb sent her teenaged son, Neil, to stay overnight so he would

be there when the kids woke up. Elaine, after going to her 12-Step meeting and visiting with Sandy, got back about 11:30.

Elaine realized she couldn't continue cooking for Barb every day, though Barb was still on crutches. With the loss of Sandy's income, going out for meals was not a wise option. Instead, Elaine made a deal with Barb. Barb would provide grocery and gas money, and Elaine would cook on the weekends for both families. As part of the deal, Neil would stay Saturday afternoon as well to help with the kids and with the cooking.

For the next few weeks, the arrangement worked. Instead of following her old codependent pattern of trying to do it all perfectly, Elaine was willing to ask for help, and to still keep up her end of things. She had to look very carefully at what she could freely give and what she could freely receive. She wouldn't give up her meetings, time with her kids, or a little time just for herself alone. She understood that she was responsible in a way she had never been before. Elaine wanted to be a support to Sandy, so she sent e-mails several times a day. The conflict with Sandy's family was not resolved, but they had declared a truce at Sandy's insistence.

Dusty was back in school, and Elaine had enrolled both kids in an afternoon study group. At first Dusty was pretty negative, but as he found friends, he was able to catch up on some of his work. Hannah found she was good at helping others learn, and she enjoyed being the teacher.

Elaine was surprised when Camilla, her sponsor, asked to see her list for Step Eight at their regular Wednesday lunch. "I've been way too busy to think about that with all that's happening," Elaine said. With increasing emotional honesty, she told Camilla that she was feeling pressured to perform in her recovery.

Camilla was silent for a few moments. "I just asked myself why I brought that up. I know you have enough on your plate for six people. I wasn't trying to pressure you, though I can understand why it sounded like that. What I was thinking about was how much I admire the arrangements you've made with your sister, the kids, and Sandy. It sounded to me like you have already begun your Step Eight list."

Elaine thought about that for a moment. "I guess I have and I didn't even know it," she said. "Let's go ahead and make it formal. I'll start a written list, and I'd like to see what the Tarot cards have to say. Will you watch as I do some readings?"

Camilla was very happy to watch and offer an occasional comment. She noted with contentment that Elaine felt confident enough to do her own readings now. When she mentioned it, Elaine seemed surprised, but after a bit of consideration, she accepted the compliment.

Elaine's first reading was about herself. She smiled when the 6 of Cups, reversed, came up to represent herself. She remembered that this card had come up in her Step Four reading, suggesting she look into her childhood relationships with authority figures. She remembered her insight that sharing with her family had been a requirement for love. She could see that in making new arrangements with Barb, she had taken the card's advice and made positive changes. The reversed Death card in the "willingness" position affirmed that she was still afraid to make changes and to let the old be replaced with the new. She remembered how this card upright in her Step One reading had warned her to change her focus from outside to inside. She saw progress, but this old pattern was still present.

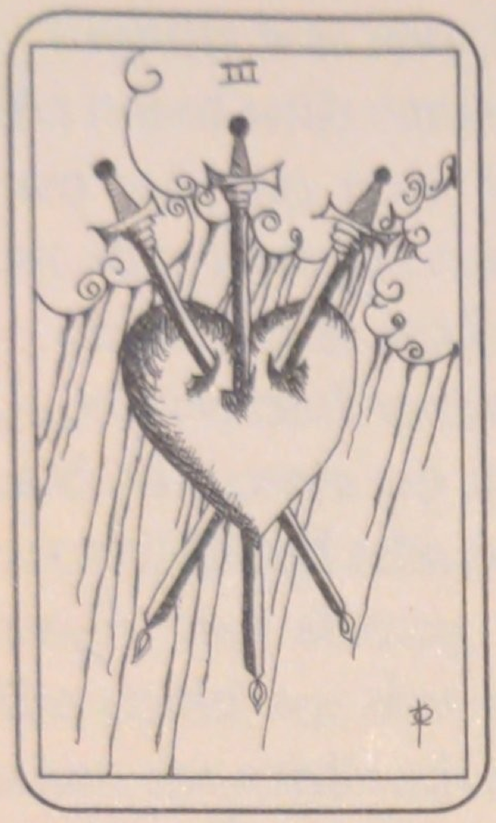
The reversed 7 of Pentacles in the "amends" position puzzled her. Camilla was also perplexed, until they looked up the card's meaning to refresh their memories. This card appears when someone is investing in "a sure thing" that turns out not to be very sure. She realized then that she had been "investing" too much in preserving the past and outward appearances instead of allowing her life to develop. The amend she needed to make to herself was to place her trust where trust had been earned, not where she wished it to be. Elaine did some readings about amends she needed to make to others.

Sandy was represented by the 3 of Swords, Temperance, and the reversed 4 of Wands. The 3 of Swords spoke of the loss and grief that were a part of the accident. The huge angel in the Temperance card showed that there were spiritual beings who had helped out and would continue to be present. The Temperance card is associated with addictions, and that served as a reminder that the old behaviors could still become active. The 4 of Wands, positive even when reversed, indicated that Elaine needed to focus on gratitude.

The "willingness" position, occupied by the Queen of Wands, warned Elaine that she could easily try to manage the whole situation for Sandy's "own good." Allowing her willingness to be spontaneous and nurturing, rather than forced, would help.

The "amends" position, held by the 7 of Cups, which had also appeared in her Step Two reading, indicated that she needed to use her

ELAINE'S STEP EIGHT READING



STEP EIGHT READING
ABOUT SANDY

creativity and flexibility. The caution was for Elaine not to allow her energy and amends to become dispersed or unfocused by trying to do too many different things or by fantasy. Elaine saw that by choosing one or two areas, she would be able to send a clear message to Sandy.

The readings for Dusty and Hannah indicated that they were struggling with the changed economic picture and with Elaine's need to be the perfect mom. The reversed Emperor in the self position for Dusty, echoing Elaine's Step Seven West position, was an eye-opener. Elaine identified with Dusty's feelings. Growing up, she had often felt responsible and helpless at the same time. She had no trouble understanding that they might feel the same way.

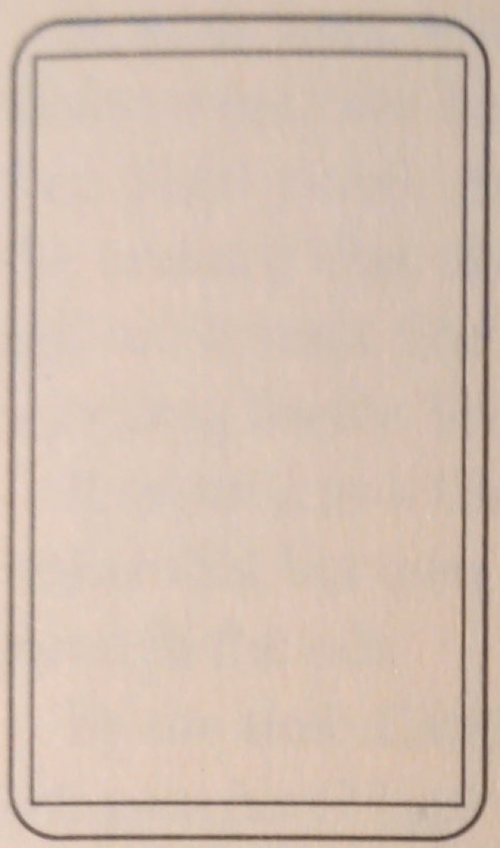
Elaine realized that her willingness to make amends was hampered by her need to be seen as competent, perfect, and in control. The amends card for Dusty was the reversed Queen of Cups; for Hannah it was the reversed Moon. Both cards told Elaine that she needed to be more emotionally and factually open with the kids. If Elaine could talk simply and honestly about the situation, she could also affirm her trust in them. In addition, she could reinforce her commitment to take care of them and begin helping them participate in her family in a more meaningful and concrete way, rather than "shielding" them. The truth was that they knew, at least on an instinctive level, much of what was going on.

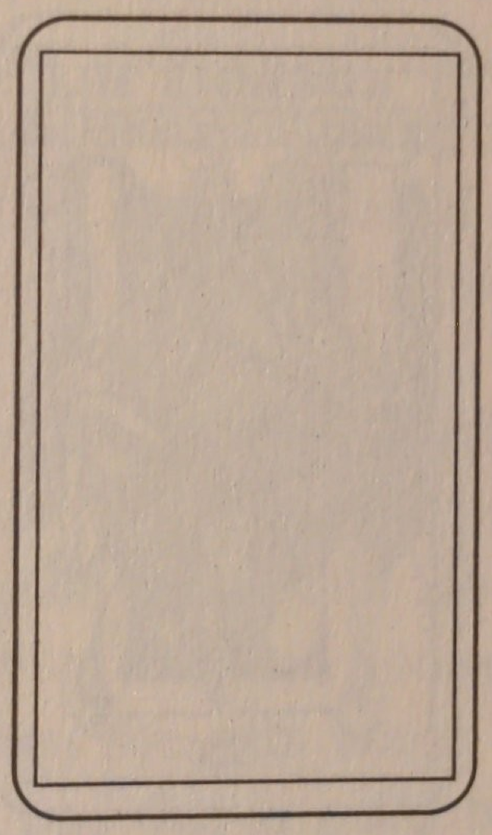
Elaine almost didn't do the Step Eight reading for her world. Camilla encouraged her to be thorough, even though Elaine didn't see any point to it. Reluctantly Elaine pulled three cards. All were Major Arcana, indicating this was an important reading.

The reversed Magician represented Elaine. Camilla was silent as Elaine pulled the reversed Emperor for the "willingness" position. Elaine just smiled and shook her head. "I suppose this authority thing we talked about in my inventory is pretty important. And obviously it's important for Dusty."

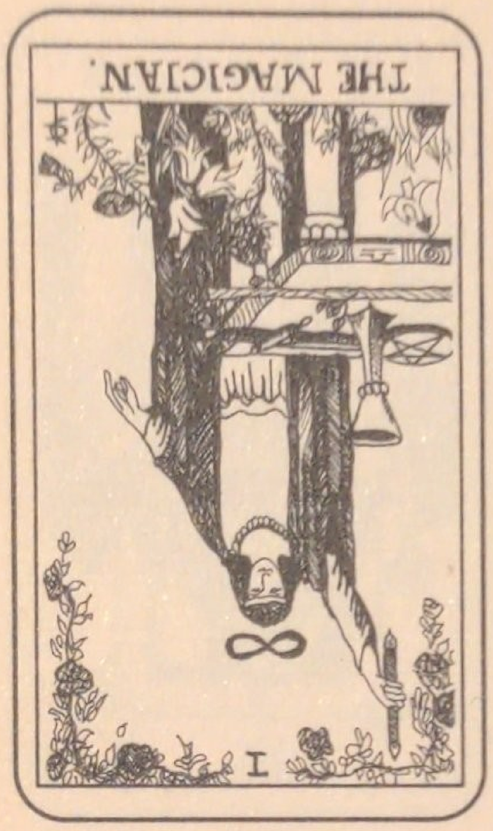
The upright Fool was in the "amends" position. Camilla reinforced what Elaine was thinking. "It seems like you really aren't consciously using your tools or your magic. Learning to trust yourself, to be aware of what you really do have to offer as an individual, is still difficult. And, yes, you do need to look at this authority thing again. I think a part of this may be learning to use, instead of misuse, power. I love the Fool here. He's saying, 'Take a chance. Let things flow. Step out and trust your new beginning.'"

STEP EIGHT READING FOR DUSTY





STEP EIGHT READING FOR HANNAH



STEP EIGHT READING
FOR ELAINE'S WORLD

A week later, while the kids spent the night at their grandmother's, Elaine went into her meditation area. She took her time and did the Step Eight ritual. As she went through the blessings for each person, she realized that she was eager to make amends to herself, to Dusty, and to Hannah. She was dismayed to discover that she still felt blocked regarding Sandy. She called Camilla and asked her to come over to talk.

It seemed as if Camilla spent a lot of time with Elaine. Camilla didn't realize that her own codependency was being active until about halfway through the talk.

By the time Camilla arrived, Elaine was upset and irritable. "What's going on here? I got a call from Sandy an hour ago. I should be jumping up and down with happiness. She's coming home on Tuesday, and I'm fit to be tied. I'm so angry, and I don't know why."

Camilla took off her coat and helped herself to some tea. Sitting at the kitchen table, as Elaine alternately paced and sat down to eat more potato chips, Camilla started getting agitated herself. She realized that she was angry, too. She found herself taking sides with Elaine and feeling sorry for her.

"What is going on here? I'm upset too, and I don't like that. I want to just bundle you up and take you home with me and stop all the stress you are under. I'm really upset with Sandy. Here you are, Elaine, working your little heart out, and then you've got to figure some way to take care of Sandy when she gets home. This house wasn't constructed for a wheelchair, and that is going to be a part of your lives until the last of the surgeries. I'm angry that Barb has a house three times as big with no steps and that Sandy's parents aren't offering at least to help with the finances."

Elaine felt the warmth of affection toward Camilla who understood. She and Camilla went on for a while, both of them complaining about Sandy's parents, and egging each other on.

Finally, Elaine sat down and pushed away the chips. The two women stared at each other.

Camilla was clearly upset. "Where did *that* come from? What's going on? I really like Sandy. She's a good person."

Elaine was just as upset and confused. "I love her. I don't understand either."

They decided that they both needed to spend some time listening. For the first time, Elaine invited Camilla into her meditation space.

They used the Step Seven ritual format, asking for wisdom from their inner Divine. Afterward, back in the kitchen with fresh cups of tea, they talked about their experience.

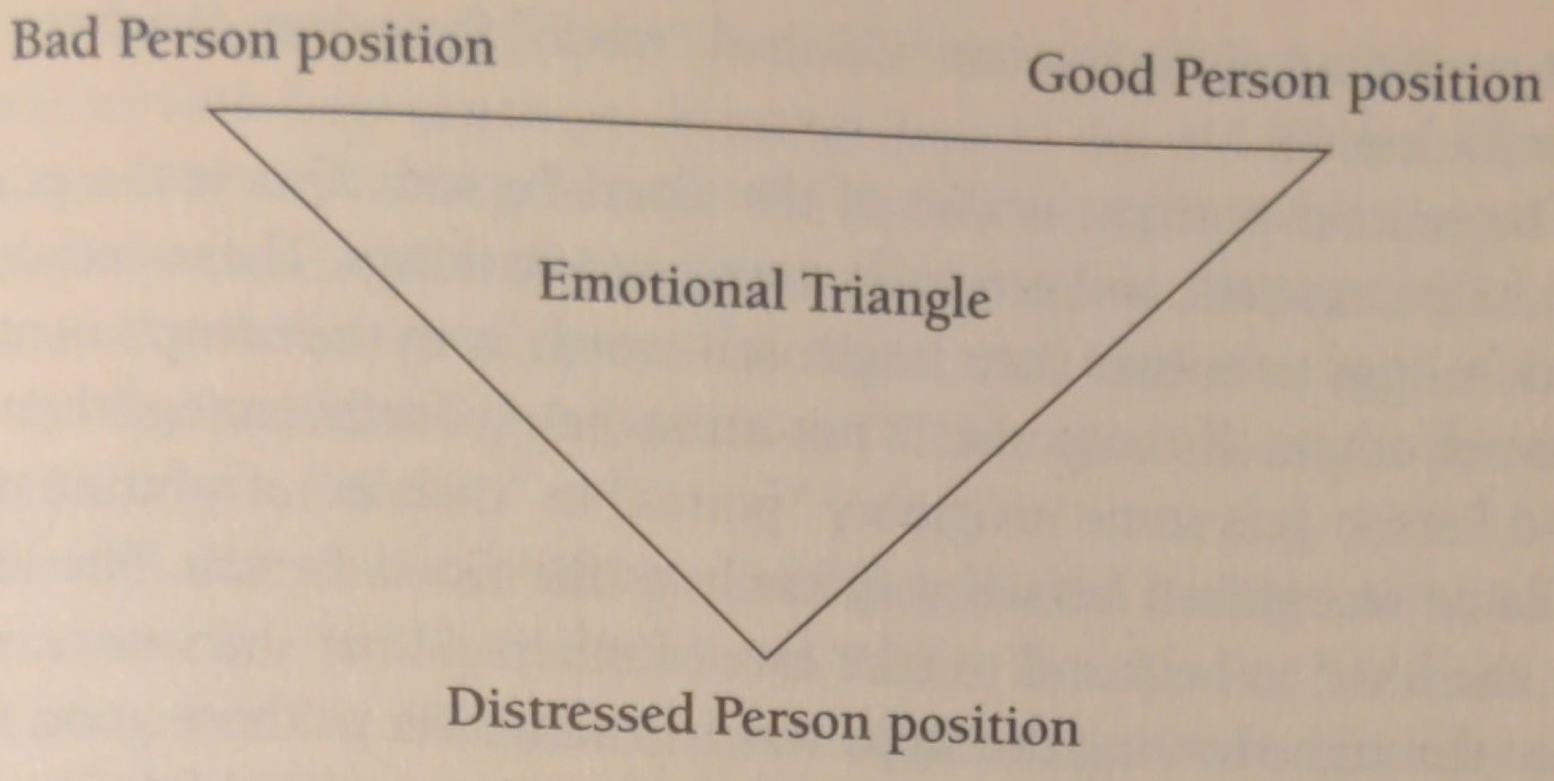
For Elaine, the ritual had reaffirmed that she needed to deal with her authority and codependency issues, and that she was on the right track overall. Camilla had been most impressed with the image of a triangle bouncing all over her inner circle. The triangle had special meaning for her. Camilla went to group therapy for codependency every other week. The past few sessions were focused on how being an adult child of a dysfunctional family affected the members' present lives. The group was currently learning about "emotional triangles," and Camilla realized that this concept might help them understand the situation.

Emotional Triangles

In a harmful relationship, emotional positions are rigid. There is the *Good Person*, the *Bad Person*, and the person who needs to be protected or helped—the *Distressed Person*. The Good Person helps, and the Bad Person hurts. The way the helping and hurting positions are acted out may vary. The people who fill the roles may change from one situation to another. For example, a Distressed Person who needs help at work might become the Good Person at home, the Good Person in a relationship might become the Bad Person in the family, and the Bad Person at school might become the Distressed Person around the house. Some people show a strong preference for one position or another, and are willing to put forth a lot of effort to keep it.

Process and substance addictions allow us to continue in these rigid positions without looking at the effect on ourselves or others. We keep our emotions at a distance by focusing on money, drugs, or food. We can say to ourselves any number of rationalizations. "I'm overspending on this party, but it's just so everyone will have a great time (and I get to be the Good Person)." "I wouldn't smoke if I didn't need to relax after being at work (and I am the Distressed Person who needs to be taken care of, and if no one else does it, I will)." "I've already eaten way too much, so another bite or two won't make any difference (and I am the Bad Person, since I've been a little bad I might as well be a lot bad)."

These three positions form an emotional triangle. In a harmful relationship, the Distressed Person is the one who needs help or protection.



This position can be filled by anyone who has been hurt, slighted, passed over, yelled at, cheated, annoyed, manipulated, or in any other way seems to be at a disadvantage. This is not something that needs to be spoken out loud. A person can choose this position by nursing resentment and being touchy about it. The often unspoken message is "I am hurt, so don't make it worse." Another way to occupy this position is by overt complaint. "I did my job just as well as Frank did, but he got a raise and I didn't." Here the message that things were unfair is clear.

Things may truly *be* unfair. The complainer, the Distressed Person, may just be venting. It is good to get things out. Sometimes just telling another person what is going on can bring a fresh perspective. That's a healthy thing to do. The problem comes when we hang on to that unfairness, dwell on it, refeel it again and again.

To adjust to Sandy's health problems and the simple logistical challenges of her life, Elaine had been making most of the arrangements and doing a great deal of the work. On one level, she felt good about being able to handle it. On another level, she felt wronged and put upon. She was surprised to realize she thought of Sandy as the one who deserved the sympathy. Yet people who heard what happened felt sorry for Elaine. They admired her fortitude and gumption. Whether she took them up on it or not, she was aware that others wanted to help in some way. When she spread the news of Sandy's accident, the first thing most people said after expressing concern about Sandy's health was, "Let me know if I can do anything."

This was a new experience for her. People actually wanted to take care of her! Even Sandy's parents grudgingly said that they knew she had a lot on her plate. That felt like incredible understanding from these people who had rejected her for so long. They treated her like a

human instead of the woman who had "made" their dear daughter "become" a lesbian.

The second position is that of the Good Person. This is the person who helps, rescues, and generally does positive things. These people get good feelings to bolster their fragile self-worth from the compliments or praise of others. If the praise is not immediately forthcoming, then the Good Person gets some imaginary "points" to "cash in" at a future date.

Elaine recognized herself very easily as the Good Person. She knew that she liked to help and to take care of others. What she was coming to see through working the steps was her addiction to those good feelings. She was aware that some of her behaviors were harmful. She had a hard time understanding that taking care of things during the crisis was a problem. She thought of Sandy's accident and extended recovery as something very different from the usual way things were. While the circumstances were changed, Elaine's reaction to extreme stress was not. She felt most comfortable as an authority figure who managed everything. She was determined to do things in a way that was not like her father's. She would be kind, loving, and considerate rather than controlling, angry, and mean.

Her outburst over Sandy's homecoming helped break down her denial. Her behavior was overtly kind, loving, and considerate. Inside she was feeling the need to control everything; she was angry, which meant she was feeling mean.

The third position is that of the Bad Person. This person is blamed for causing the hurt in the first place. Here are the thoughtless friend, nasty coworker, stupid clerk, bill collector, problem child, person who got the undeserved praise, and the irresponsible parent. We don't like to see ourselves as the Bad Person. In rigid positions, the Good is all good, and the Bad is all bad, and the Distressed is all helpless. This is an example of the extreme all-or-nothing attitude that is a hallmark of harm. If I admit to being less than perfect, I can lose my Good Person position and become the Bad Person or the Distressed Person. This set of rigid roles does not allow for other choices.

Here's an example. A family goes for a December visit to Great-Aunt Edna, who used to love to ice skate. Here they get set up for rigid positions. The Good Person and the Bad Person are the overt authority figures. Mom says, "Remember that Aunt Edna is not as young as she used to be [she is the one who is helpless], so nobody suggest we go

out on the frozen pond [if you do, you'll be the Bad Person]. Everybody chime in with how much you'd rather look at the old albums [and the first one who says that gets to be the Good Person]." When they arrive, Aunt Edna has a pile of ice skates by the door. Obediently, Timmy ignores the skates, runs up to Aunt Edna, and begins to beg to see the family albums. Edna laughs, and says "I'll bet your mom put you up to that! Let's go anyway!"

Several triangles unfolded here. Edna moves to Bad Person by having the skates out, Timmy claims Good Person for obeying his mom, and Mom becomes the Distressed Person because she tried so hard to make things nice and is unappreciated.

While they are skating, Mom is the Bad Person for trying to stop them from having all this fun, Edna is the Good Person for suggesting it, and when Timmy falls down and hurts his knee, Timmy is the Distressed Person. Edna becomes the Bad Person for suggesting the skating, and Mom is back to the Good Person because she helps Timmy.

A seeming paradox of the helpless position is that this is actually the most powerful position in the emotional triangle. The harmed one, or Distressed Person, gets to indicate who is good and who is bad.

In her youth, Elaine learned how to get the position as the Good Person by doing lots for others and ignoring her own needs. Growing up, she had been encouraged to take care of others before taking care of herself, or risk being called selfish and mean. She learned that authority figures hold the Good Person position only if they take care of others. Over time, she became so used to placing the position of Good Person between herself and reality that she became addicted to the process. Working with the steps had helped Elaine begin to change the old patterns.

Sandy's accident reinstated the rigid positions. A lot of Elaine's anger had to do with emotionally anticipating who would get to play what positions. She had had a taste of "Distressed Person of circumstances beyond your control." She liked the notion of someone else caring for her, though the position was unfamiliar enough to be somewhat uncomfortable. Elaine had done enough of her work that she knew she didn't want to be sole caretaker, or Good Person. Sandy would get to occupy the helpless position. That only left "Bad Person" for her.

Elaine saw several aspects of her own perceptions about this role. It was clear that she had some deep resentment toward her father. There

were echoes of the struggles of her five-year marriage to Barry, Dusty and Hannah's father.

Barry had been charming, handsome, and bright—perhaps too charming. The third time Elaine had to go for treatment for a sexually transmitted disease, she left him. She had been faithful, but obviously he hadn't.

Over their years together, she noticed that Barry was just as moody in private as he was charming in public. Sometimes she found it easier to just say nothing. Now she realized that his moodiness placed him in the Distressed Person role. He couldn't help it if he felt bad or depressed (or so she assumed). He would wait until one of the kids got out of line, making the kid the Bad Person, then tell Elaine that she had to take care of the problem, thereby offering her the Good Person role. She knew there was something wrong, but she didn't know how to get out of it. If she didn't or couldn't take care of the problem, he would become more and more irritable and either storm out of the house or scream at her or the kids. When he came back he never talked about where he went or what he did. Looking back, Elaine realized that this felt just like the home she grew up in. She remembered being very concerned when she noticed Hannah starting to watch Barry carefully, especially if he had had a couple of beers. When he reached for the remote control, the little girl would run over and hand it to him trying to be helpful. Dusty just hid in his room. Elaine remembered the moment she had realized that what had started as a wonderful life had become something she never wanted to be a part of again. She especially didn't want Hannah and Dusty to go through the emotional hell she'd gone through. Elaine had wrestled with lots of second thoughts, but she had no real regrets about leaving Barry.

She knew that she wanted things to be different with Sandy. And she was coming to realize that she needed to clean up her past in order for that to happen.

Step Nine

Step Nine is about specific, outward action. The actions come from the list from Step Eight of amends we get to make. Step Nine says:

> *Made direct amends to all whenever possible, except when to do so would violate the Rede.*

Does this mean I really have to go and tell the department store that I stole a six-dollar bottle of perfume when I was a teenager?

No, I don't *have* to. Yes, I *get* to.

But they're not in business now, so what do I do?

That's where we listen to our inner Divine guidance, talk to others, and make a decision. I might

- choose to buy a bottle of perfume and donate it to a group that gives teenagers gifts for their birthdays.
- donate twelve dollars (prices have gone up) to a worthy cause.
- tell my story and how I harmed myself and others by stealing the perfume.
- make amends to myself by buying a fragrance that I really like and use it with a clear spirit.

How do we know if what we plan is truly amends for the other person? One way is to simply ask. A gesture that may be meaningful to us may not be important in helping to clear the wreckage of the past. If we try to force a particular amend on someone, all we have done is deepen the denial-and-abuse cycle.

Phil's Story

A few years ago, when Phil was first working on twelve-step recovery, he had realized he needed to make amends to his former wife, Lila. He stopped by the copy center where she worked and asked if he could talk to her on her break. She said okay, and he waited around until she was free. He told her he realized that his drinking, gambling, and infidelity were to blame for a lot of their problems. He went on to say he knew that living with him had been hard on her, and that divorcing him was the only reasonable thing to do. He talked for about ten minutes. Lila was stunned. He had never admitted fault about anything, and to hear him apologize was almost beyond belief. Lila was pleased that he was finally seeing things that had been so evident to her. He asked whether she could ever forgive him.

"Sure, of course, I can forgive you," Lila answered.

"Wow, thanks. You don't know what this means to me," said Phil, a weight lifting off his shoulders.

They talked a few more minutes, and Lila tentatively brought up the time he had used the rent money for a poker stake.

"Heh," said Phil, offended. "That's behind us now. You forgave me."

Lila didn't know what to say or do. She was relieved when her supervisor interrupted and called her back to the cash register. She said goodbye to Phil and spent the rest of her shift in a daze. At home, she still couldn't put her finger on what was wrong. After all, he had apologized very sincerely.

What Lila didn't have words for was her intuitive sense that Phil had not truly changed. He had never heard her side of things. She felt talked "at," not "to." As she replayed the conversation, she realized that it was still all about him. When he talked about the problems he had caused with his addictive behaviors, they seemed larger than life, and somehow he still seemed extremely powerful. He made a tragic, dramatic figure. The more she examined her feelings, the angrier she got. The yellow anger signal that something was wrong with the whole scene had been going off. She felt crazy even thinking about the encounter at the store.

Genuine amends come out of the prior steps. When we realize the harm that we have done we wish to make it up and not do it again. Now Phil realized that what he had called amends did not really clear the past.

Phil knew he had to call Lila again, but it was hard to do. He did the Step Nine ritual as preparation, then gathered up his courage and picked up the phone.

Lila sounded tired, but she agreed to meet him at the bookstore café during her break. Phil got two mugs of cocoa, touched the bag of Step Nine stones (see *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*) in his pocket, and took a deep breath.

"Lila, I want you to know I'm here to begin to make real amends to you." As he noted her skeptical look, he knew he was doing the right thing. "When I apologized last time, I was really only interested in getting out of trouble and impressing my friends with my sincerity. You really don't have any reason to believe me, but if it is okay, I'll tell you all about what is going on with me now."

Lila considered. "Phil, I'm just too tired to listen to all your stuff. If you're sorry, you're sorry. Forget it. I don't really care."

Phil was taken aback, but he saw the truth in her words. "You're right. I'm trying to put my stuff on you. I know you have a life of your

own now without me. I have screwed up, and I'd like to make at least financial amends to you."

"Really? Like what? Six promissory notes and a load of lies?"

"No, I figure I owe you at least seven thousand dollars for the car and the loans. I'd like to pay it back to you, though I can't do it all right now. I will pay at least twenty dollars a week. I've got one hundred and forty right now to start, if you'll take it."

Although this seemed different to Lila, her yellow anger signal still went off inside. She still felt like he was setting the terms. "How do you figure you owe me seven thousand dollar?"

"Frankly, I don't really know what I owe you. I just added up what I knew was left on the car, and the credit cards, and added twenty-five percent. Are there other things I didn't think about? Would giving you money even be an amend to you?"

Lila replied with some heat. "You didn't think about the money you took out of my purse, the times I bailed you out, and the bill for counseling."

Phil responded. "I must have done a lot more damage than I realized. I'm really sorry, and I really want to get square with you."

For the next few minutes, he listened as she told him things she still resented. At first, he was very defensive, but the bag of stones in his jacket pocket helped him focus on his purpose.

After she wound down, Phil felt very depressed. He told her he appreciated her honesty and that he knew that growth and self-discovery could be painful. He apologized again, and this time for specific things he had done or failed to do. He told her that he really didn't know how to make any kind of amends other than money.

"Money is a good start. But you know what I really miss? I really miss your skill with plumbing and wiring now that I'm in a house."

This was something Phil could offer to do! "Lila, would you be willing to let me make some amends by doing some of that work for you?"

Suspicion flared again in Lila.

Phil saw the look on her face. "I'd still pay you the money regularly, but I'd like to just help out. I don't want to ruin your social life or anything, but I'd feel better if I was doing something to make your life better instead of worse. If it seems okay for me to help, I'd like you to call me."

She said she'd think about it. She did take the $140, and his phone number.

Expectations

Phil and Lila both had expectations about what Step Nine amends should be. For Phil, simply admitting that he was at fault seemed like enough. He didn't see any reason to go over every single thing that had gone wrong in their relationship. The truth was, he honestly couldn't remember them all. Offering a sincere apology was all he could see to do.

Lila did not see that as enough to make up for all the heartache and confusion. She truly appreciated his apology, but she still felt unsatisfied. She asked herself if she would have been more comfortable if he repaid all of the money he had spent. "Partly. It wouldn't be enough, though," was her answer.

Phil's apology was a good start. It fell short of genuine amends.

Elaine's Story

Dusty and Hannah both knew that they were supposed to stay out of the cookie jar before dinner. Sandy was back from the rehabilitation facility, and she was napping. Elaine was running late getting home from work. The kids were both hungry, so they decided that just this once it might be okay to have a couple of cookies. As brother and sister will, they began to squabble about who got which cookies. Somehow the cookie jar toppled over, shattering as it hit the floor. Just as they were beginning to yell at each other, Elaine walked in.

She knew from having worked on the steps that this was exactly the kind of circumstance that would bring out the worst in her. She took a deep breath, then very calmly told them both to go to their rooms.

Elaine's tendency in the past was to figure out who to blame (the Bad Person) and then punish that person. The fact of guilt makes no difference because anyone who is being punished sits in the Distressed Position. Sandy would step in, in the Good Position. Elaine would lose the Distressed Position first, then the Good Position. In the end, she would occupy the Bad Position.

She knew she still needed to address the disobedience and the broken cookie jar. She decided to take a time-out for herself, after she cleaned up the mess and put dinner in to get warm. She asked Sandy to wait until she sorted things out to talk about what happened.

Elaine went into her meditation area. After grounding, centering, and reaffirming Steps One, Two, and Three, Elaine went to Hannah's room, then to Dusty's. She told them that she was feeling angry, sad, and overwhelmed. She also said she wanted to be fair. To do that, she wanted each of them to tell her their truth. She listened carefully, and checked with each to be sure that what she had heard was what they really meant to say.

Back in the kitchen, as she dished out the casserole, she considered what she had heard. Sandy was engrossed in a movie, and the kids joined her, eating dinner on TV trays.

It was Tuesday—Elaine's meeting night. She was relieved that it was a speaker meeting, though she heard very little of the speaker's story. The time away from the house had helped her clarify what to do. She knew she had to change the way she had done things in the past.

When she got back, the kids were still awake. Sandy was sleeping. A warning bell went off inside, but Elaine ignored it. She took the kids into her bedroom and plopped on the bed with them.

"What are we going to do about this cookie jar thing? And what are we going to do about my getting dinner ready so late that you are too hungry to obey?"

Hannah and Dusty didn't know how to respond. They expected to get yelled at and punished. Their blank faces told Elaine that she wasn't being clear. She tried again.

"I blew it. I need to tell you I'm sorry that I kept you waiting for dinner. I'm the mom, and that's my job. I think the message I sent was that with all the stuff happening around here, I don't have time for you. It's true I'm really busy and stressed. It's also true you two are my kids, and I love you both."

Dusty and Hannah moved closer to Elaine. She put out a hand to each of them and smiled. "I'm really sorry. I'm going to have to say no to any last-minute stuff at work. I'm going to do my best to be home on time so you guys get fed."

Hannah began to cry. "I don't want you to go to work or stupid meetings. I want you to stay home." Dusty said "Me, too."

Elaine held them both. "I wish I could stay home all the time, and I wish you could stay home all the time with me."

After a few minutes, Elaine sat up and asked them, "How can I make it up to you?"

"Stay home and play games with us."

Elaine laughed. "Well, I can do part of that. I will try to get home on time. Would my playing a game with each of you separately, and one together, every week for the next month, be an amend?"

They were both thrilled with the idea. The three of them set up times to play.

Very quietly, Dusty said, "But what about the cookie jar? I broke it."

Elaine smiled inside. "What about the cookie jar?"

"I'll give you my allowance for the next two years to pay for it."

"I'm very happy you want to do that. Let's look for a new cookie jar, and I'll pay half. You pay the other half out of your allowance. Okay? Is that fair?"

"Okay!" said Dusty.

Hannah said, "I could give you some money 'cause I might have broken it some, too."

Elaine smiled inside again. "Did you break it, too?"

Hannah mumbled into the pillow. Elaine gently took her hands. "Yeah, I broke it, too. You can have some of my allowance."

Elaine knew this was important for all of them. She could see that being emotionally honest with herself and the kids began a positive cycle. Listening and hearing were helpful. Taking responsibility for her part of the problem, and not blaming or shaming, was a great role model for the kids. The best part was that she did not expect anything from them. When they followed her lead, she was surprised and pleased.

Later, her Step Nine Reading confirmed part of her work but raised more questions. The Heirophant reversed talked about direct amends she needed to make, indicating that a new spiritual path as well as a new way of taking care of those in her charge was a good idea. She recognized that she had done this by practicing spiritual principles in the cookie jar incident with Dusty and Hannah. The method card was Death, a card about transformation and change. It reinforced the idea of a nontraditional way of doing things. She saw that there was a shift in the way they were relating to one another, and the transformation had begun with the change that she had asked for in Step Seven.

The idea of having too many choices and living in a fantasy world, shown by the 7 of Cups in the caution position, puzzled her. She had seen this card before. She felt like she was moving without many

ELAINE'S STEP NINE READING

choices and much too bound to reality. As she reflected, she realized she had made a number of choices over the past few months, and that there were still many choices before her, some of which were not realistic. Her hidden fear, the reversed Empress, indicated that what she was nurturing would not come to fruition. She wasn't sure if this was about Hannah and Dusty, her relationship with Sandy, finances, or work. The outcome was the reversed Queen of Pentacles. Seeing that, she decided that her careful plans for how things would go financially and at work might not be what would happen. In addition, she was aware of a vague concern about her relationship with Sandy, since Sandy's astrological signifier was the Queen of Pentacles.

Step Ten

Step Ten is the short version of all the steps that came before. By keeping our accounts balanced regularly, we find that we are able to do a much better job of using our time, our energy, and our resources. We find that while the same issues may arise over and over, we know better what to do with them. First we recognize them, admit them, and take the steps we need to take to correct what we have done that was harmful to ourselves and others.

Step Ten states:

> *Continued to take personal ethical inventory, and when we caused harm, promptly admitted it and corrected it.*

When we do see things come up, we begin to ask ourselves a hard question: "Why am I continuing to harm myself and others in this way at this time?"

The Wraith of Self-Harm

Twelve-step recovery may be seen as one extremely long, complicated spell to rid ourselves of the *Wraith of Self-Harm*. We may give lip service to not harming ourselves. It is easy to say, "I take care of myself," while setting aside our genuine needs or wants.

A *wraith* might be thought of as a kind of ghostly presence; it is a

spiritual collection of energy. Any time that strong or repeated emotional, intellectual, physical, or spiritual activity occurs, energy is generated. Like unwiped crud at the bottom of the oven, it builds up and eventually becomes a problem. Like the addictive cycle, a wraith may begin with small things. And like the addictive cycle, the wraith eventually must be dealt with.

So why go though all this stuff? In Step Seven, I talked about my problem with Gertrude. During the writing of this book, through long discussion with others and personal spiritual work, I became aware that I had indeed raised up a wraith. This wraith, full of my emotional baggage from over the years, had become so substantial that it was able to threaten me from the outside; it was fueled by my own energies. Until I recognized the wraith for what it was, the best I could do was to make temporary peace with it. And, like any peace based on denial, it was *only* temporary.

It wasn't that I didn't want to know reality. I did, and I do want to know the truth. It wasn't that I was unwilling to change; it was that I was not *able to* see the problem until I had unpeeled enough layers that I *could* see. I know that this revelation is only another layer and there will be others in my life. One of the joys of recovery is that many times what is under the next layer is beautiful, honorable, useful, fun, and true. So the layers under are even better! It's rather like opening one delightful gift, to discover that part of that gift is an even more delightful treat, and so on.

It works this way. I began to use a particular behavior to protect myself and others from real or seeming harm. I built a strong and virulent wraith over time because I like to give people the benefit of the doubt and try to understand where they are. If this was the only energy I put into this wraith, it could be a blessing.

That was not all there was to it though. Initially, I wanted to protect myself from making wrong judgments, and I wanted to send out what I wanted to receive back. The roots go back at least to grade school. I remembered that a teacher explained to me that all of his students started the grading period with an A. To maintain the A, we had to meet certain standards. Another teacher told me all his students started out with a C, and we could go up or down from there. I liked the idea of starting with an A, rather than having to work up to an A. I used this idea as a basis for my assumptions about people and circumstances in my life.

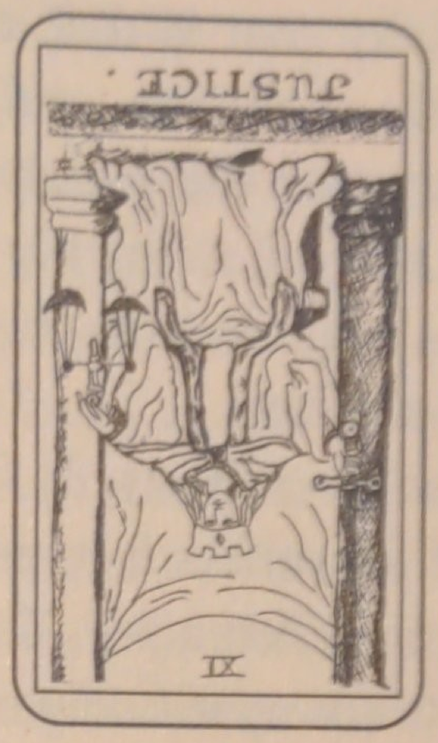
This did not become a problem—an addictive behavior—until it began to harm me. I began to take on a little "extra credit," since it seemed to me (partly because of my poor self-image) that others started me with a C, or even an F. A little extra credit couldn't hurt me. Over time, the wraith I raised up constantly chattered in my head. It told me that I was not adequate, not good enough, not smart enough, not giving or loving enough, or not worthy. Soon the wraith didn't even have to begin the litany of self-castigation. It was so much a part of "me" that I did not even notice it was there. It was the way things had always been and so deeply rooted in me that I felt lonely if it was silent too long.

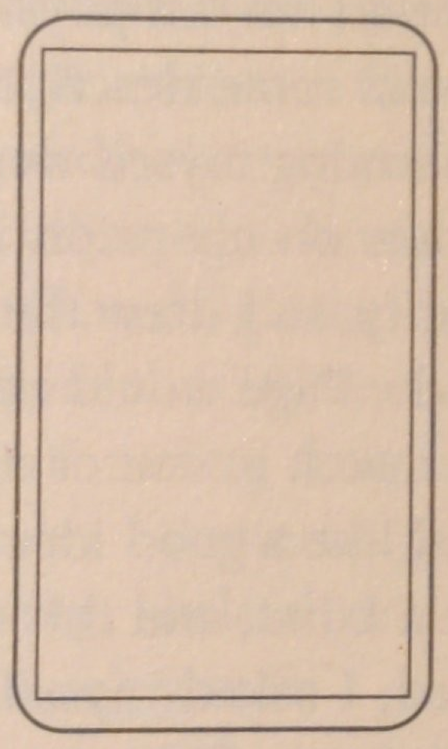
As I grew, I automatically took on more and more commitments to do things. Part of the seductiveness is that often the commitments were to things I was good at or believed in. The disease of addictions is often called cunning, baffling, and powerful. Using my actions, as well as my fears, I fed the wraith in two ways: By taking on too much, I obviously harmed myself; by harming myself, I proved that the wraith was telling the truth, that I really was not able to do what I said I'd do, including taking care of myself.

The nasty little bit with cutting others too much slack—and myself not enough—showed up when I found myself furiously angry at trivial things and rather unaffected by extremely important issues. I found myself right back in my denial cycle.

Naming the obvious aspects of this wraith was the easy part. Whom did I resent, dislike, have problems with, not get along with very well, or have a personality conflict with right now? Someone in my life fits this description—call him Alphonse. That was the name of my wraith. It represented not an actual person—like Alphonse—but an emotional scapegoat that I used to replace an honest version of that person. I asked myself: What do I particularly dislike about this person? What behaviors really set my teeth on edge? What words would I use to describe this person?

I easily described Alphonse as critical, negative, irresponsible, and lazy. I particularly disliked his expectations that I would hear and understand him, and that he had no such obligation to me. Of course, given my ongoing issues with finances, this relationship had a financial component. In it, I saw him draining me. I saw others supporting his behaviors, but saw myself as too smart and too aware to allow this to happen to me. I could afford to be generous and kind. After all, I needed to think the best of others.





CYNTHIA'S
STEP TEN
READING

When I did my own Step Ten reading, the 5 of Pentacles represented me. The second card, the Page of Pentacles, representing harm to myself, matched in suit. The Pentacles suit is about practical things, such as power, money, work, and sex. My problem was definitely in those areas. The 5 indicated that I was feeling very sorry for myself, refusing to see what light was already there. I was seeing myself in the Distressed Person's role, trying to make Alphonse the Bad Person. I was waiting for someone to rescue me, to be the Good Person. My own health problems, combined with the stained-glass window, spoke to me of how I made excuses for myself and used them as a filter (or window) to limit my reality to something easier for me to handle. I was particularly interested in how much I had criticized Alphonse for seeming so negative, so whiny, and so helpless. Alphonse, in my mind, seemed to always expect people to pity and rescue him without taking advantage of what was available.

The nasty, tricky part is that all those terrible, ugly, snippy, yucky things were really about me, and not about Alphonse at all. Looking back, I can clearly see the patterns. I was in a close relationship with a person who came off as highly critical of others, demanding of me particularly. This criticism was an echo of what the Wraith of Self-Harm had been doing all along.

When I turned over the cards for harm to self and others, I was able to turn the card for others face down because it did not match in suit or number the 5 of Pentacles. The Page of Pentacles appeared in the position for harm to myself. Pages in general represent people who are physically young, in a learning process, or acting immaturely. Since this was the "harm to myself" area, and I am not physically young, I focused on the ideas of immaturity. I read some descriptions of the Page, and what seemed to connect with harming myself were the burden of debt, placing my physical needs too low on my priorities, and taking care of others. I wanted some more clarity, so I drew the Justice card reversed, which is numbered 11, just as the Page would be if it were not a court card. While the requirement to match in suit or number does not apply to the clarifying cards, it seemed like a good idea to pay extra attention to this one. Astrologically, I am a Libra, and this card is often used as a signifier. Because it was reversed, I asked myself what was out of balance in my life? Where was the injustice? How am I not taking responsibility for myself? The answers were clear: I was feeding my Wraith of Self-Harm and calling it Alphonse, pretending it wasn't really me. The card next to it was the 10 of Wands, or the codependence card, which seems to plague my personal 12-Step Tarot readings. This simply confirmed that I was definitely carrying others' burdens, rather than my own.

I spent some time with a trusted friend, and we explored the ways this wraith was harming me and standing between myself and reality. I realized that I could not simply tell this wraith to go away. I'd done that time after time, and it was still there. I knew that I had to freely give it a different kind of feeding, so that it would not harm me. I could no more rid myself of it without greater harm than I could cut off my nose because I had a cold.

I asked my friend to help me with the Step Ten ritual by guiding me on the journey, asking me the questions out loud, and listening to my answers.

Cynthia's Story

We went to a sacred space, and together used the Recovery Spiral format to establish the circle and purpose. She led me down through my chakras to my inner circle, where I greeted the quarters. She instructed me to go to my inner North. As I walked out, I discovered an entrance to an old mineshaft, boarded up and in disrepair. A rough plank over the lintel said "The Cave of Self-Harm," so I knew I was in the right place. I had to struggle to remove the dirty, weathered strips of wood that stopped me from entering. When I had done that, I had to squeeze into the narrow opening of a small, cramped, dark, and musty tunnel. I scraped myself several times just trying to get through. When I finally got into the cave itself, it appeared filled with treasures and wonderful things. A beautiful woman, sitting on an elaborate throne, was off to the right. As my eyes adjusted, I became aware that most of what was in the cave was pasteboard, glitter, and rotting cloth. The woman, dressed in an outfit from the 1930s, was far too thin to be healthy. I noticed a faint smell of rotting fruit, and the light had become less inviting, eerier. The more I contemplated the woman, the more I realized that she was starving, skeletal, and pathetic.

"What names shall I call you?"

She didn't answer at first; then names began to roll out. "Alphonse, Gertrude," she began, then continued to name people whom I resented. She finished with a nickname that I had always hated.

"For what do you hunger?"

The light in her eyes intensified. "Acceptance, love, praise," she answered. As she spoke I felt her hunger in my own stomach, the longing for these things in my own heart. I felt parched and desiccated.

In the silence, I approached her. At my friend's instruction, I took her hand and looked at her for a moment. "I know you are a part of me. I accept you, and call you by my own name. As I heal, so you will heal." Then I fed her with kindness and caring until she was strong enough to return my handclasp, stand, and walk out of the cave with me.

Together, we walked around the circle. I presented her to each of the quarters. In each place, I said that she had been called by the names she had given me, but now I called her by my name.

Each time I spoke, I was aware of more transformation happening

inside of me and—literally—of my shadow, who is the Wraith of Self-Harm.

When I checked on the mineshaft again, the opening was covered with flowering vines, and the air smelled fresh. The sign was gone. One of the Ladies of the North was sitting outside, busily sewing. When I thought of Wendy sewing Peter Pan's shadow onto him, the Lady looked up and winked at me, then went back to her sewing.

My friend led me back to the everyday world in the usual way, and we talked about what had happened.

My real-world experience of Alphonse was transformed. I was able to treat Alphonse as a human being who deserved basic respect. I was also able to detach from situations in which I was in close contact with Alphonse. I was able to separate my emotional baggage from Alphonse's and draw clearer and clearer boundaries. Over time, because I was cleaning up my own side of the street first, I was able to be more emotionally honest and to know what I could or could not freely give.

It is important for me to keep a very careful watch on my own harmful patterns. I had very easily slipped back into the part of my disease that makes excuses. Part of allowing my resentments to simmer is that I can have a "reason" to stir myself and others up emotionally, insist that others let me be the Good Person or the Distressed Person. I have to keep walking the Recovery Spiral road on a regular basis, or I will begin harming myself and others.

Summary

The Recovery Spiral can help us achieve true freedom from harming ourselves and others. We have done lots of preparation and realize the value of continuing to tread the spiral path. We may spend a great deal of time making amends for our past harm. We learn the value of nipping harm in the bud, of pulling out the roots of the weeds in the garden of ourselves. With the presence of the Divine and others in our lives, we can have the discernment and strength to continue our recovery.

5

CELEBRATING JOY:
The Principle of Balance

Steps Eleven and Twelve

We have worked, and worked hard, to walk the first ten steps. We have made significant changes in our behavior, attitudes, and lives. This has not been easy, and we may have already had to go back to earlier steps several times. Step Eleven is a way to stay connected daily to our recovery and our spirituality. Step Twelve helps us continue to deepen our recovery on a regular basis.

We have come to realize that spirituality fills a void in our lives and hearts. Without having Spirit in our lives, we cannot be in genuine balance, or grow. We know we have truly made progress when we begin to regularly experience and express gratitude, hope, and joy.

To honor the Spirit, the Center, the place of the Divine, we choose how much time, energy, and resources we will give to any relationship or activity. Here we choose *balance*. We make our recovery real in our lives by making choices that address all of our needs, and, when appropriate, the needs of others. We find that we want to give, and better still, we find that we are not constantly drained. We find that we have extra energy and time available. Therefore, we do give, but in a healthy way, out of our abundance, rather than out of a need to have others give us back emotional satisfaction. We become more like channels for a river than like a lake that is created by a dam. We understand that we

cannot be channels for joy unless we are regularly being filled by both being and doing.

Our spirituality becomes a very practical, daily part of our lives. We try to integrate, rather than separate, our will and our lives with others and with our world.

Step Eleven

Step Eleven isn't very dramatic. It has to do with consistency, rather than valley or mountaintop experiences. We tend to be attracted by big gestures, earth-shattering events, and exotic ideas. Many of us like acting different roles or having cool stuff. This step isn't about those things; it is about small, private things we do, reflective of who we are. Step Eleven says:

> *Sought through activity and meditation to improve our conscious knowledge and contact with the Divine Presence, seeking only to choose in harmony with the greatest good.*

In this step we seek to develop our spiritual selves, not to show off or prove to others how perfectly evolved we are, and to continue our recovery. This is the kind of thing we do simply, even privately.

Our development as spiritual people seems to have some specific levels, or stages. Researchers, among them Carol Gilligan, James Fowler, and Lawrence Kohlberg, have identified a series of stages to express different points in the process. I have adapted their findings, which are primarily set in a Christian context, to help us understand both recovery and a Pagan perspective.

Stages of Spiritual Development

When we begin using any substance or process to stand between us and reality, we freeze our development in one or more areas. When we come to recovery, we find that our emotional, rational, and spiritual development may match less-developed patterns than are appropriate for our age or situation. We find in our recovery that we often need to start at an initial level of growth and move through stages that we may

have either missed or not completely finished. We often realize that in one area we may be considerably more developed, and in another we still have some significant growing to do. This can be frustrating if we believe that recovery is about being perfectly wise and healthy right now, or if we are simply impatient. It's worth understanding the phases so we give ourselves permission to be where we are and to grow from there. By understanding that recovery is a spiral, we are able and willing to revisit different stages as we consider different aspects of our lives.

As we grow, we find ourselves giving responses that are not consistent with our own stage of spiritual development. Therefore, we often have to go back to these, and other, early stages to understand where our responses originate.

A hallmark of many addicts, active or in recovery, is a very real sense of spirituality. When addiction is active, our spirituality is something that is internal. It is not connected to others except by unspoken ties. A recovering addict may also have a very private spirituality, and the idea of Divine Presence may be used as almost a talisman or good-luck charm to keep positive things happening.

Because spirituality is such a vital part of recovery, it may be helpful to understand how we learn and grow as spiritual beings.

BUILDING BRIDGES STAGE

The earliest stage of faith comes to us as infants. We are the center of our own world, and our lives focus on what is immediate to our senses. If our bodies react with contentment, we want our experience to continue. If our bodies react with pain, we protest and want our experience to stop. We begin the process of putting something between our reality and ourselves. We learn that crying brings relief from the discomfort of a hungry tummy, so we cry when we are uncomfortable. We cannot understand the importance of a medical procedure. We do understand that it hurts us, so we simply want to stop the immediate hurt. We do not understand the future, and we do not have enough experience to plan for it.

If our attention is engaged in something, that is our world. As very young children, we do not have strong language and processing skills. We simply assimilate what happens in our immediate world and how we respond. We like things that are repetitive because we are learning to trust that our world is reliable. Trust and trustworthiness are the basic spiritual building blocks of this stage.

Very young children also seem to have an innate spirituality, a contact with things that we as adults do not see or understand, which we may call *spirit*. We might see the spiritual development of the infant and toddler in terms of learning to build bridges between those built-in senses and the senses of the body, between our inner and outer lives. How and if this happens depends a great deal on the individuals involved and circumstances that surround them.

We carry these bridges forward into our adult lives, for better or for worse, and we revisit this phase many times in our spiritual lives. This is just fine to be here. In fact, not putting the chemical in our bodies, or not using the process, is where we have to start the spiral of recovery.

Paralleling this stage of spiritual development, active substance abusers may simply seek a drug to come between them and withdrawal. An active process abuser may simply repeat acts that brought release or pleasure in the past. We don't think through these decisions. Instead they seem to happen at the level of instinct. A Pagan might believe that karma or the laws of threefold return are responsible for her sex addiction, and there is nothing she can do about it. Cognitive processes are not used except in service to the addiction. The processes are much more instinctual.

After a certain point in the spiritual deterioration of a process or substance addict, it becomes more and more difficult to break out of the addictive patterns.

A recovering Pagan addict may instinctively stay away from the substance or the process that is a problem without knowing why or seeking healthier ways to get needs met. The recovering Pagan addict may express her spirituality by drumming, without words or formal ritual structure. She might walk as a way to relieve tension, rather than lashing out in anger, all without making a conscious choice.

COMPARATIVE STAGE

The next stage of faith development is about making comparisons and sorting things out. In this stage, often as preschool and early grade-school children, we begin to learn about different levels of power. If we are fortunate, we encounter the idea that power over others is not the only way. We learn that it is possible, and often preferable to have power *with* others. We make comparisons—bigger or smaller, older or younger, colder or hotter. These help us make judgments about both what we like and what we don't like.

From our earlier spiritual stage, we learned about inner and outer self. Now we are learning that there are others in our world, and that we can adapt in various ways to make our inner selves more comfortable. We can be "the same as," or "different from." We still have a difficult time sorting out where our power ends or begins, and where the power of others begins and ends. We are getting glimmers of our conscious choice that will have a specific outcome. We may be able to compare, but we are not always able to gauge how that affects us.

We may make connections between our spiritual world and the everyday world. For instance, we may decide that our favorite aunt went away because we did not learn all the words to the Pledge of Allegiance. We are then devastated when we learn all the words and she doesn't come back. At this point, we are still developing rational and logical skills.

We may also actively and consciously put our processes or substances between ourselves and reality. We may learn that a cookie can distract us from the pain of a scraped elbow. We may realize that if we focus on a video, we don't have to really hear an adult's angry words.

At this stage, an active addict may try to appear clean or sober to avoid punishment, not because of an ethical conviction. A money drunk may make a point of how much money he didn't spend on his ritual robe to avoid the criticism of his friends. A food addict may not eat much at the postritual pitch-in meal, then binge on leftover macaroni and cheese in private.

A recovering addict may build an image of the Divine Presence based on wishes and power, and maintain a distance from her addiction so as not to get into trouble. She may choose a frightening or vengeful aspect of the Divine to focus on, allowing spirituality to help her be more ethical. The stronger the image of the Divine is, the stronger our motivation to stay out of trouble.

SPECIFICS STAGE

By the time we are in grade school, and sometimes junior or senior high school, we may move on to a more concrete stage. Here the images of the Divine Presence are very literal. The image of justice has to do with exact fairness and the keeping of specific and definable rules and laws. Goodness means fairness and the ability of others to meet my needs, fantasies, and desires. All-or-nothing thinking characterizes this stage.

Group and personal loyalty are extremely important. At the same time the fickleness of the moment means that friends are not reliable. Things are true only if they can be "proven." Facts, figures, and photographs are important standards for reality, but they must be used "fairly." People in this stage love to debate, prove, and judge.

This stage can be seen in the active addict who demands proof that twelve-step recovery works better than another method. The addict may cite newspaper reports to prove there is no problem. The ritual tradition of cakes and wine may serve to give an addict permission to be divinely drunk. If we join a coven at this stage, we often put our expectations on the leaders to be spiritual giants. If they fail to meet our fantasies, they have failed and we have an excuse to exercise our addiction to drama by "calling them" on this behavior. Often people more focused on rules or laws may insist on a specific lineage of initiation or training. Others may make a rule out of having no particular training, only a spiritual endorsement, as proof that they are worthy.

A recovering addict may manifest this stage by being fiercely loyal to a recovery program, particular person, or certain group. She may make specific lifestyle and attitude changes with the support of like-minded people.

RELATIONSHIPS STAGE

The relationships stage focuses on relationships with others; it is often seen first in high school students and is present in many adults. Here we develop a strong identity with those who think, feel, look, act, or seem similar to us. Feelings, rather than thoughts, validate truth and reality. Intentions count for as much as actions.

At this stage, people often have very generous impulses toward those who are less fortunate. Myths, stories, and other narratives have only one real meaning, which is usually very clear. The lens through which we interact with the world is our desire to be seen as a lovable and good person. We tend to see the Divine Presence in a particular role, such as caring parent, punishing avenger, or healer, and try to imitate the qualities that are most like our feelings.

An active addict in this stage will insist that his feelings and intentions mitigate any unacceptable behavior on his part. He may know that it is wrong to shoplift. Because he "just felt" that the lovely amber necklace was intended for him, he was somehow allowed to take it

without paying for it. Another might have *meant* to stop playing computer games, and that is the important part. That she spent all night preparing characters for a role-playing game, wasting just as much time and energy, substituting one addiction for the other, was her way of joining in the battle between good and evil.

A recovering addict can find a great deal of help and healing in learning from this relationships stage. The strength and hope of friends or group members can give the Spiral of Recovery new meaning, and the Divine Presence as loving parent can inspire him to try new ideas and behaviors, without worrying about doing things perfectly.

COMMITMENT STAGE

The next recognizable stage is a consciousness of responsibility toward groups or organizations that do positive things. We see the value in pooling our efforts. Here we see a move back to more objective, rational criteria for the validation of truth. Myths and stories have many different meanings, which are separate from the symbols they contain. The Divine Presence is much more abstract, and there may be a conscious rejection of specific names or roles for that presence. We place a great deal of emphasis on talking about our own beliefs, values, and ideas.

Often we seek to make our relationships with others more formal and clearly defined. We have explored and evaluated other systems and have moved into a different place. We may listen with tolerance, but we have an agenda of persuading others to see things our way.

The active addict in this stage is likely to be using work or external activity, especially if the activity is connected with a larger helping situation in which to practice addictions. At this stage, the fact that she is doing things for *others* seems to justify her specific behaviors, without regard to the impact or harm for the individual. If the people in her meditation circle make a point of volunteering at the homeless shelter, the addict may take on this project even if she barely has any time to spend on her hobby or to relax as it is.

A person in recovery at this stage can find appropriate ways to give back and to act in gratitude. Time, energy, and resources are all equally valuable. A "thank you" with a smile to everyone who works at a restaurant is a way to give back. Offering to baby-sit while a friend goes to the library, or an extra five-dollar bill with a few words of appreciation to a child who mowed the grass, can express an attitude of gratitude.

DOORWAYS STAGE

The next stage is one that is not often seen outside of a spiritual context. We cherish symbols and rituals both for themselves and for the doorway they provide to deeper reality. We often say "both/and" rather than "either/or." The ability to stand outside of relationships or systems, while still staying connected to them, is a mark of this stage. We have a deep concern for basic human and planetary rights. We want to understand the many different aspects of any issue, so we seek out differing viewpoints. We are very self-reflective, asking questions of our own motives and actions. We are willing and eager to discover the uniqueness of others and to affirm them in their difference.

Even in this seemingly beneficent phase, addictions can stand in our way. An active addict in this stage will bend over backward to try to understand and accept the behavior and attitudes of others. He will put up with things in the name of understanding that most would not tolerate. In trying to understand and affirm uniqueness, the active addict will allow people to drain him emotionally and financially. He might give all his time and money to a coven member in trouble, believing it is his job to do so as the High Priest. Some choose to live in impoverished circumstances to enhance their spirituality. Others might easily fall into the trap of anorexia, and let it masquerade as an ascetic life.

The recovering addict will be open to evaluating herself and others, while remaining committed to respecting the differences and drawing boundaries where necessary. She can say no, or yes, when appropriate to a friend's request for money.

Other stages of spiritual growth tend to appear later in life. One stage is characterized by a deep and personal dedication to truth on a universal level, a willingness to go beyond the material and to be of service in any way possible. The forms of service are diverse. We see names like Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi associated with this level when it takes a primarily outward form, and we may see such people publicly praised. Another type of growth is deep internal growth, and we hear names of various mystics as examples of those who are on this path. Either type of growth and development can and does occur in ordinary people as well.

No matter how far we develop, we are all still vulnerable to addictions. An active addict at this level would tend to ignore the balance

between the outward and the inward, acting out of self-centeredness rather than self-centering. She might work for the cause of equality for Pagans while failing to take care of herself. A recovering addict would continue to strive for balance, and might do the same work, but do it from deep conviction and personal transformation, and in a reasonable way. Mother Teresa was quoted as having said that she needed to wash the sick and dying because it kept her in touch with living spirituality. Daily communion with her Divine Presence, and regular activity of service, were both important to her.

When we look at the literature of many spiritual leaders, whether their development was more external or internal, we find a theme. All of them are convinced that they have a besetting addiction (they use other words, like *sin* or *pride*) to their own spiritual self-centeredness. They are very aware that they are easily seduced by this, and have to strive daily to keep in conscious contact with the Divine Presence.

Elaine's Story

Improving her contact with the Divine had been up and down for Elaine. She really wanted to do this, but time often slipped away. She found herself on "automatic," and had to consciously and deliberately make the effort to reconnect with the Divine. Sandy had been at home almost three months now. The first adjustments to awkward furniture and schedules had become more routine. The days and nights were very full, and a lot of her friends, both from the coven and the recovery groups, pitched in. Sandy's friends from work had started dropping in more regularly, too.

Something still felt really "wrong" inside Elaine. One Saturday morning, she noticed that Sandy was much more irritable than usual with the kids, yelling about almost anything. After one of her old friends left, Sandy seemed much calmer and positively sweet. By midafternoon, Sandy was back to being nasty.

Elaine came into the family room, her movements covered by the blaring TV. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a flash, like light on glass. Where did the glass come from? Only plastics were allowed in the family room. Curious, she walked around the sofa and looked at Sandy, who was apparently sleeping. Peeping out from under the stuff on the table, including what seemed like too many empty prescription

drug bottles, was a small mirrored compact. That didn't make any sense. Sandy didn't use makeup.

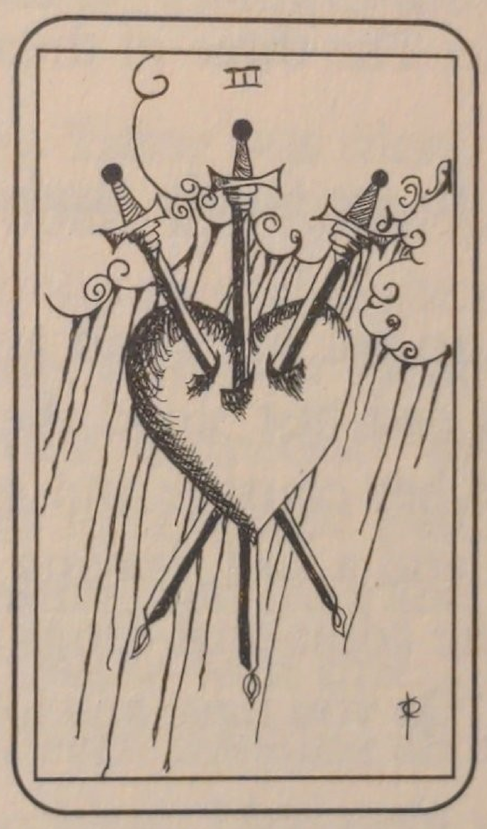
The mysterious reading she had done for Step Eleven this morning came back to her. The answer to "What do I need to know?" had been the reversed Lovers. Elaine associated that card with her relationship with Sandy. She now saw that the give-and-take of the relationship was out of balance, and that she needed to see things in a new way. The image of the huge angelic being between them, keeping them apart, felt wrong. Putting that intuitively together with the mirror, the empty prescription bottles, and the abrupt mood changes, Elaine was deeply afraid that Sandy was using drugs more than recreationally.

The "What needs to change?" answer had been the 3 of Swords. She needed to figure out what was going on, because Swords often point to mental processes. The 3, with the pierced heart and rain, indicated that the process would be painful and might involve betrayal. The "How shall I do it?" response had been the 6 of Swords. The swords, stable and upright in the boat, reinforced the idea of clear thought, of drawing a boundary between turbulent and calm emotions (the water). Again the themes of loss, moving on, and a change of direction were clear.

She knew she had to confront Sandy. She turned down the TV, but Sandy didn't move. She gently shook Sandy, who did no more than shift. Elaine spoke to Sandy and still did not get a response. She tried several other things, then decided that she was not able to rouse her. Elaine hated to cause a fuss, but she called Sandy's doctor. Of course, the doctor was gone for the weekend. She left a message, and then she tried to wake Sandy again.

Upset and scared, she decided that this was too much for her to handle alone. She called 911 and told them she could not rouse Sandy. It only took a few minutes for the paramedics to arrive. One of them asked what medications Sandy was taking. Elaine dutifully got out the list provided by the pharmacist. The tech made a call to the hospital and reported Sandy's vitals, saying that he could not rouse her either. In what seemed like seconds, Sandy was hooked up to a bunch of tubes and monitors, then loaded onto a gurney. The ambulance was screaming down the road as Elaine herded the kids into the car and followed them.

By the time they got to the hospital, Sandy was already being treated. Elaine called Camilla and Sandy's parents. Camilla arrived at the ER



ELAINE'S STEP ELEVEN READING

moments before Sandy's parents did. Fifteen minutes later, Sandy's parents were called to the reception window. They consulted briefly and called Elaine to join them. She was surprised, but inwardly pleased even at this late date at being accepted as a part of the family.

Camilla said she'd watch Hannah and Dusty, so Elaine followed them into the private room, where the doctor was waiting. "Sandy's going to be fine now, but it was close. If the medics had been a few minutes later, she would have died."

The doctor explained that the tests had shown other drugs in Sandy's system, as well as an overdose of the prescribed ones. The interactions had caused significant breathing problems, compounded by Sandy's still-healing injuries from the car wreck. They would be keeping Sandy in the hospital for at least twenty-four hours to flush her system and be sure that she stayed stable. The three of them could see her for a few minutes now.

They were all relieved to see Sandy awake. "What happened?" she asked.

Sandy's mother began to pat her hand and told her not to worry, things were fine. Sandy's dad just stood there, a little apart, looking angry. Elaine gathered up her courage and gave a brief, detached description of the last hour and a half, leaving out what the doctor said about the overdose and the additional drugs in her system. She ended with a question to Sandy. "Do you have any idea about what might have caused this?"

Sandy shook her head and looked Elaine in the eye. "I don't have any idea."

The world seemed to narrow to the two women. The sounds of the hospital and the presence of Sandy's parents seemed to fade into the background.

Elaine tried again. "Sandy, the doctor said that other drugs were in your system besides the ones prescribed for you. Do you know how they got there?"

Sandy, still looking Elaine in the eye, shook her head again. "I don't know what you mean."

A third time, Elaine spoke. "Sandy, dear one, I know you've been using. I don't love you any less. I just want to understand, and I need for you to tell me the truth."

Sandy shook her head a third time. "I've only used what the doctor told me to use. I haven't been doing any other drugs."

At this point, a nurse came in and asked them to leave. They said their good-byes to Sandy and walked into the waiting room. Sandy's parents actually smiled at the kids and at Camilla. They decided to stay a little while longer, hoping to see Sandy again after she was moved to a regular room. They headed for the cafeteria and invited the others to join them. Elaine thanked them but said she and the kids were going to go home.

Camilla could tell something was very wrong. She offered to follow them home, and she asked if she could come in for some tea afterward. Elaine gratefully accepted and asked if Hannah and Dusty could ride with Camilla. As she started up her car, she realized she was too overwhelmed to be driving. She turned off the engine and got out of the car. She asked if Camilla would be willing to drive her home too. She could pick up her car later.

The kids chattered, but Elaine was silent. They stopped at the local burger place on the way home, and Elaine ate what they put in front of her. The kids played with the toys from the children's meals. At home, they went next door to play with their friends.

"Okay, Elaine. What really happened?" asked Camilla.

Slowly, sometimes with tears, Elaine told her the whole story. "So it seems that Sandy is still using. And she's able to lie to me with a straight face. I can't—no, I won't—live with that. I don't know what to do. I feel like a terrible person even thinking about deserting her while she is still healing from the accident. I feel even worse thinking about what everyone will say. Everyone has tried to be so helpful, and even Sandy's parents are starting to accept me."

After Camilla had gone, Elaine decided to look another time at the Step Eleven Tarot reading she had done earlier in light of the afternoon's events. She remembered how the cards seemed to help her intuition just before the call to the paramedics. Now she saw even more. The first card, answering the question, "What do I need to know?" was the Lovers, reversed. Elaine remembered how encouraging that card had been to her when she first began to work with the Pagan Recovery program. She saw a bright future for Sandy and herself, one where spirituality was unifying and wonderful. She noticed that reversed, the card seemed to show spirituality, represented by the angel, falling out of their relationship. She knew how lovers treated each other could be an indicator of how each viewed themselves. She wondered for a few

moments if she was angry with herself, rather than with Sandy. No, she decided as she looked at the second card, the 3 of Swords. This card answered the question "What do I need to change?" She didn't like the answer, as it confirmed the idea of a breakup, with the pain and emotional turmoil that entailed.

The final card, the 6 of Swords, answered the question: "How shall I make the changes?" The 6 showed an adult figure and a child in a boat, being rowed away toward a new land. The idea of journey over troubled emotional waters to reach a new place was so clear for Elaine.

Elaine wanted more information, so she did the second version of the Step Eleven reading, which can be found in the *Recovery Spiral Tarot Manual*. Strength in the North cautioned her to be watchful concerning her body's needs. She saw her own addictions becoming active if she allowed work to overpower her life as a way of denying the reality of the problems with Sandy. The advice was simply that balance is required.

The Heirophant was in her East. She knew that her unwillingness to bend to the rules of society was a part of trying to hang on to her relationship with Sandy. She knew that anything that did not honor the truth was hypocrisy. In addition, Elaine was aware that unforeseen problems had already appeared.

Judgement (reversed) was in her South. She saw this as a caution to be extremely careful about what she said and did in the next few days. Elaine also knew that deciding something only one time may not bring enough strength of will to carry the decision out. She saw that she would have to make her decisions about her relationship with Sandy over and over again.

Another reversed card, the Hermit, was in the West. Elaine understood how much she wanted this whole difficult time to open the door to recovery for Sandy. She knew her feelings were very strong, and because the card was reversed, she decided to place a greater emphasis on the actions that had brought them to the present. She really didn't want a new association with anyone. The card seemed to confirm that she should not seek to find another lover. It seemed to hint that there might be a possibility of reconciliation if the mundane things were handled appropriately.

Even though the readings seemed fairly clear, it was hard for Elaine to believe that a radical change was necessary. She decided to take no action right away, but to see how things developed.

ELAINE'S ADDITIONAL STEP ELEVEN READING

Step Twelve

Knowing we have reached Step Twelve brings a sense of relief and accomplishment. We are accustomed to seeing an end to our journey, and it is difficult to move from a linear to a spiral way of perceiving and acting. When a goal is in sight, we may permit ourselves to relax a little. The good news, and the bad news, is that recovery is a spiral. Step Twelve helps us consolidate our gains, begin the next twist of the spiral, and point us back to Step One. Addictions are cunning, baffling, and powerful, no matter where we are in our recovery. Unless we continue to focus on our own development, we will find ourselves slipping back into old patterns. We cannot afford to be less than vigilant.

It has been said that if we have no history, we have no future. Step Twelve connects us to our history, our present, and our future, as people in the spiral of recovery. We are given some very practical instructions on how to focus on recovery, continue our growth, and express our joy.

Step Twelve says:

> *Having had spiritual awakenings as results of these steps, we offered this opportunity to others and practiced these principles in our lives.*

We notice that this step refers to awakenings, not a single awakening. We have learned and grown, or awakened, in many areas of our lives. We have changed physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. These awakenings come from our own work on the steps, and we have begun to see these steps as a chance, an opportunity, to improve our lives and the lives of those around us.

We offer. We do not proselytize. We realize that awakenings happen gradually and that each awakening builds on the others. We practice. We don't have all the answers, because we know that the journey, not the destination, is what is helpful to us and others.

Shields and Defenses

In the Pagan community we hear a great deal of talk about *shields*. A shield is exactly what the image suggests; it is something used deliberately to keep us from harm and to provide safety. Certain kinds of

shields are necessary and appropriate. In the physical world, we use clothing to shield our bodies from the effects of the weather. We use our dwellings to shield us from predators, food to shield us from starvation, and vaccines to shield us from disease.

In the spiritual realm, we may use shields to protect ourselves from "astral nasties," energies that may harm us or others. We may use shields, including dim lighting or an imagined wall, to block out distractions so we can connect more closely to Divine Presence.

Part of doing ritual is erecting shields to block out any harmful or distracting influences. We can do this by using various mundane things:

- Walking around a sacred space and sprinkling water or salt to symbolize protection
- Seeing ourselves sweeping away harm
- Mentally constructing images that appeal to our sense of safety
- Using a mirror ball, hung in a window, to deflect negative energy by reflecting it back to its source

We eventually discover that shields are most effective when layered and varied. To use a rather bureaucratic example: An answering machine picks up when we call a government agency. We are instructed to indicate our needs by pressing certain buttons. Then we press another set of buttons to signal our account number. Eventually, we may speak to a real person, who asks us to say our name, our address, and perhaps other identifying information. Depending on what we wish to do, there may be other layers of shields we need to go through. We can't simply call up the president and discuss our problem. There are too many shields, or layers, to screen out that kind of call.

While we need to have *helpful* shields in place, we also need to be aware that addictions can generate *harmful* shields. These shields are part of the harmful spiral of protecting our supply of substances or our ability to exercise our processes, which takes us further from reality. The further we are from reality, the harder it is to come back and face what we fear. We often do not build our shields consciously. We work on uncovering our patterns, and what shield they may represent or enable, using the 12 Steps. Part of recovery is coming to recognize what is helpful, and what is harmful, whether we have chosen knowingly or not. We practice continually, learning what will serve us best, and try to be more conscious about our actions and activities.

A helpful shield does not hide reality, but protects us from real harm. Using psychological and intellectual defense mechanisms inappropriately will hinder our recovery, even if we are not technically using our substance or process of choice. The more we hide from truth and reality, the less likely we are to be able to grow.

Following are some of the most common shields, or "defense mechanisms" that we use. The first bold word (marked with ⇩) describes some extreme examples of the unhelpful or harmful aspects of shields. The second bold word (marked with ⇧) shows the other, helpful end of the continuum. A final paragraph (marked →) offers suggestions, based on the material discussed in Step Three, for accessing parts of the self and the Divine that may help balance the shields in helpful ways.

• **Denial** (⇩) is the core of our defense mechanisms, our basic shield. We protect ourselves and others from what we fear may be painful truths by pretending that they do not exist. The strength of our denial can be amazing. We are capable of denying what others can plainly see, understand, or perceive. We have all overlooked a veiled insult, but it takes a very active denial system to overlook an arm broken in anger. I may know something is wrong with any group, Pagan or otherwise, that insists I must have sex with the leader as a prelude to joining the group. Yet my desire to belong may be so intense that I deny that anything is unusual about that requirement.

• **Recognition** (⇧) allows us to look at reality. We try to notice many aspects of our world and our relationships, while being careful to keep appropriate boundaries in place. For example, I may not like knowing that I have an ingrown toenail, but I can make better decisions about how to treat it if I recognize it for what it is. I also recognize whether I have health insurance coverage and how treatment will affect my work and my family, as well as myself. I don't deny myself the attentions of a podiatrist because I have an amethyst crystal that was intended for a healing stone.

My Literal Guide (→) can help me recognize the simple facts, and my Abstract Guide can help me understand how these facts are woven into my life.

• **Fantasy** (⇩) permits us to live in a make-believe world. The world can be created by our internal selves, or provided by books, videos, or music. In our fantasy, we can solve problems with ease by changing

other people, winning the lottery, or having superpowers. I don't have to worry about cleaning the snow off of the front porch because the elves will take care of it. I don't deal with the bills because I'll get a better job soon, and then I will pay the whole thing off.

• **Imagination** (⇧) used consciously, allows me to experiment with different ideas and solutions. I realize that these are possibilities, not realities. I may use active imagination as part of a meditation, or I may do a couple of divinations, asking about the outcome of particular courses of action.

Our Instinctive Seeker (→) can generate creativity so important to the imagination. Our Abstract Guide can help us integrate reality and possibility.

• **Intellectualizing** (⇩) sounds so good. We seem reasonable, and our thinking sounds so clear. We put any opposing or uncomfortable viewpoint or action in a box and label it. Once it is labeled, we can ignore it, but say that we have "dealt" with it. That way we don't have to deal with our fears, pain, and guilt openly. If I say that I got laid off because the boss was jealous, I don't have to concern myself with my own behavior. I don't allow my thoughts to go any further. A label, for others or us, is enough to express and dismiss the problem. If I have labeled someone as "closed-minded," I don't have to listen to her genuine concerns about my behavior.

• **Searching** (⇧) for additional reasons and outcomes allows our minds and our intellects to consider things beyond labels. We take action, rather than assuming that knowledge is enough. I ask myself what my part in getting laid off was. I don't let a real or imagined flaw in someone else give me an excuse to indulge my addictions.

Using the part of ourselves that is the Considering Guardian (→) keeps us from ignoring other aspects of learning and acting.

• **Rationalizing** (⇩) is close kin to intellectualizing. We can take an action or attitude, ours or another's, and explain it. I have every "rational," justified excuse for why this time is different, reasonable, or appropriate. Some examples: If I hadn't gotten the speeding ticket, I wouldn't feel bad. There is "nothing wrong" with spicy food; therefore, I should be able to have some curried shrimp. Rationalizing lets me ignore that I have stomach pains after eating seafood. Everyone else in the group has some mead when it's offered in the cakes and wine ritual, therefore I can have some too.

Rationalizing lets me believe that my alcoholism doesn't count because the context for its use is spiritual.

• **Evaluating** (⇧) a number of aspects of an action or an attitude helps us see things in a larger context. We can ask ourselves whether what we are choosing to do is helpful or harmful, considering other factors. We realize that what may be rational or reasonable for someone else who does not have our addiction problems, either emotional or physical, may not be good for us.

Our Structuring Guardians (→) and our Literal Guides work together to help us understand the consequences of our actions and attitudes.

• **Displacement** (⇩) happens when we target someone or something less frightening to receive our hidden feelings. We may yell at the stupid dishwasher, when we really want to quit our job. Displacement does not have to be about "negative" feelings. We can displace our own longing for creativity onto someone who is creative and set aside our creativity in service to theirs.

• **Directed feelings** (⇧) allow us to identify what is underneath an outward expression. This does not mean that we have to curse the boss, and it does mean that we realize that we know that our dog does not deserve to be ignored because we are angry with that boss. We allow ourselves to experience our own desires, needs, and feelings, and we do not put these on others. If I am feeling snappish, I do not have to take offense at an offhand comment and blame the other person for being rude. The snappishness and rudeness is about me, not him.

When I moved into our house last year, I knew that I would be stressed and on edge. I knew my own addictive behaviors well enough to know that I could easily blame anything that did not go as I wanted it on other people. I would displace my uncomfortable feelings onto others. I really did not want to take out my frustration by yelling at those who were simply trying to help. I made a conscious choice that during the move I would be appreciative of any help others chose to give. No one who was trying to help deserved to be yelled at because I was on edge.

I also spent some time planning what kinds of jobs needed to be done, and who would have the best chance of doing those tasks in an appropriate way. For example, I asked friends who had back problems to help with things other than carrying boxes. I was able to see the larger picture—moving into a wonderful house *and* keeping my friends!

My internal Social Seeker (→) and Accepting Guardian were helpful to me here.

• **Repression** (🡻) occurs when we simply block our feelings and thoughts, pushing them down completely. I may simply ignore the warnings on the cigarette packages about lung cancer. I may tell myself that since I shouldn't be jealous of my sister's new boyfriend, I am not feeling anything.

• **Expression** (⇧) allows me to acknowledge even my uncomfortable or unacceptable impulses. I do not have to act on these, nor do I have to be nasty to anyone. I can express myself to my sponsor, the Divine Presence, or to myself. As I work with the things I don't like in myself, I can begin to find ways to change them.

I can engage the curiosity of my Adventurous Seeker (→) and the unconditional attention of the Accepting Guardian to help me explore my own history, present, and future.

• **Introjection** (🡻) is a therapist's word for adopting someone else's values, lifestyle, beliefs, or actions without sorting through them to see whether they are really good for me. I simply accept them. I take on a load of "shoulds" and "oughts," but don't examine them. If I believe I should never get a divorce under any circumstances because that is what my grandmother believed, I may not be able to make appropriate choices for my children or myself.

• **Differentiation** (⇧) is another therapist's word for when we explore, compare, and contrast our selves, our lives, and our world to the experience and beliefs of others, and make choices based on what is in harmony with the greatest good.

Our Considering Guardian, our Integrating Guide, and our Instinctive Child (→) encourage us to live in the present and learn from the past.

• **Reaction formation** (🡻), another specialty concept, occurs when I finally examine and reject one set of behaviors, attitudes, or choices. I tend to swing all the way over to the very opposite. If I have been very careful with money, I may go on several spending sprees. If I never cared for spirituality, I may find myself involved in religious activities seven days a week.

• **Balance** (⇧) happens when I realize that I have moved too far on the continuum of thought, behavior, or action and I seek to correct the problem by a moderate response. I do not have to swing all the way to

the other end of the pendulum to make up for what I have done, or not done, in the past.

The Structuring Guardian (→) helps me identify where I am, and the Abstract Guide helps me identify where I want to be.

• **Compensation** (🡻) occurs when we overindulge in one area to make up for frustration in another. For example, if I am afraid of being seen as a lazy person, I may work extra hours without being asked. If I have a picture of myself before beginning recovery as a selfish person, I may make up for it by giving anything and everything I have to anyone who asks. Often these forms of compensation are used to meet some standard that has not been consciously accepted or articulated. They are also reactions to labels that may have very little connection to reality.

• **Cultivation** (⇧) of desirable traits, rather than overbalancing out of fear, can lead us to make positive and active, rather than negative and reactive, changes. I can consider how people who aren't lazy act. I can imagine myself as a productive person, rather than a lazy one, and take steps to achieve that goal. I don't have to try to satisfy a standard that is not my own.

The Structuring Guardian (→) can help me shape my desired changes into attainable goals, and my Abstract Guardian can set these in a context of helpful behavior.

• **Undoing** (🡻) happens when we do not carefully consider the impact of our actions. We may not make good connections between what we are doing and what we are trying to make up for. For example, we may spend two hours organizing the sock drawer, when the cat litter hasn't been cleaned out in weeks. The pristine sock drawer does not undo the smell. In terms of amends, we may buy a lovely sweater as a gift as a way of expressing how sorry we are for wrecking the car. The sweater does not undo the crumpled bumper.

• **Connecting** (⇧) our behavior to the desired outcome allows us to consider whether we are harming ourselves, others, or our world. Rather than acting on impulses that may arise from our addictions, we take responsibility for ourselves and the impact of our actions and attitudes.

Our Social Seeker (→) helps us make choices from our genuine desire to be with others and to integrate our lives with theirs. Our Structuring Guardian helps us evaluate our actions and attitudes in terms of our ethics. The Literal Guide gives us an objective perspective on what we choose.

• **Identification** (🡻) means overtly trying to be more like someone who is admired or respected. Sometimes this means just hanging around a particular person, so some of the glory rubs off. Occasionally we ally ourselves with a cause or a group because we feel different or alone. By being associated with this person or cause, we imagine we have acceptance—at least in the group. For example, I might identify so strongly with my coven that I become obnoxious at work. I might insist that I must have every Full Moon day and evening off for ritual, as well as every Great Day. I might be unwilling to accommodate reality and cover it under the banner of being "persecuted for my beliefs."

• **Recognition** (⇧) of our similarities or differences can help us mature in our recovery. We are able to realize that we can find understanding and comfort from different sets of people. We are able to tell the differences between ourselves and others, though we may be very much alike in certain ways. We may share common goals, hopes, or dreams. We and others have a history that brings fresh perspective to situations and experiences. We can celebrate our unity and diversity alike.

Our Instinctive and Adventurous Seekers (→) help us express our individuality, while our Social Seeker brings us together with others.

• **Projection** (🡻) means covertly trying to bestow on another the qualities that we dislike in ourselves. It's easy for us to see these things in someone else, and by our loud protestations of dislike, create the illusion that we are not that way at all. For instance, I can judge someone for being so judgmental. I may think that I am way too easily swayed by the opinions of others, so I criticize my friend for not speaking up when something is bothering her.

• **Integration** (⇧) lets me see and recognize harmful traits in myself and make positive and active steps toward their transformation. If I can see that I have a need to do things now because I am having trouble controlling my impulses, I can begin work on channeling the energy of my impatience into something more helpful.

My Accepting Guardian (→) can help me see and welcome who I am, and my Considering Guardian can help me be willing to be transformed, and do the work I need to do to be ready to be transformed.

• **Withdrawal** (🡻) can occur emotionally, spiritually, or physically. It is easier to say nothing, to not rock the boat, to claim, at least tacitly, the Distressed Person role. The person in this role, as we have seen, has the most power in the relationship.

An important concept in interpersonal relationship is that of *emotional heat.* This means we get used to, and are comfortable with, a certain amount of intensity and closeness in our relationships. We may like very few, very intense contacts. We may prefer a gentle, even pattern to being with people. Once we establish a comfort zone, we try to regulate the relationship so it maintains our preferred heat. If a relationship is one that thrives on crisis, a smooth period may be uncomfortable. I may create a crisis by withdrawing, or moving away, to generate the heat, which we have come to associate with equilibrium. It is likely that my partner may move closer to maintain the comfortable distance, or heat.

• **Engaging** (⇧) occurs when we draw closer and try to connect. We can do this physically, spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally. I change the distance between us. Usually, if I move a little at a time, we have the time to adjust to one another in a new way. When you come to the first ritual at my house, I may welcome you with a smile and a handshake. Over time, as our contact and our sense of closeness increases, I may greet you with a gesture that offers a hug.

When we do ritual and magic together, we are drawing closer, or engaging. We are becoming more vulnerable and trusting. The more trust we establish, the more likely I am to be able to tell you what I am feeling and thinking. If I can trust that you will listen to me with acceptance, I risk revealing more of my true self.

My Social Seeker (→) wants to be more connected to others on a deeper level. My Accepting and Structuring guardians provide a needed balance between trusting and caution. But allowing all three to work together, I can take reasonable and measured risks of exposure.

• **Regression** (⇩) happens when we feel distressed or overwhelmed and return to earlier stages of action or maturity. For example, a kindergartner wants to drink from a bottle when a new baby is brought into the home. The child sees that the baby is getting attention, and wants some for himself. We get tired of working a recovery program, so we seek the attention and encouragement that the newcomer gets, even if she is doing all kinds of things that we have learned no longer serve us. I might see her being reassured that spending too long in front of the TV is understandable with her situation. Even though I know through ten years' experience that sugar is harmful to me every time I overindulge, I might want assurance that my situation makes it understandable that I ate the entire carrot cake.

• **Progression** (⇧) occurs when we continue to move into more helpful behaviors and attitudes. In the spiral of recovery, we may feel frustrated that we are seeming to go over the same issues again and again. It is true that we look at the same addiction issues over and over. What changes, or progresses, it how we view them and what we do about them. It is a progression to look at the carrot cake, realize this is a particular problem for us, and to not make an excuse for our desires, or to act out our resentment that it is not helpful to us. We may or may not choose to eat it, but the choice is ours. It is progress to accept the right to make a choice, the responsibility for that choice, and to choose in harmony with the greatest good. We begin to see our desires for praise and attention as markers of ways we judge ourselves inadequate or unworthy, or as genuine desires to share our accomplishments with those we care about. We may be more conscious of what we choose to do or be and praise ourselves first. Later we can ask specifically for what we want. We may choose to model the behavior we desire or ask what is meaningful to others. Because people can't read our minds, we can let them know. If applause is meaningful praise for me, I can let my friends know that. If a written note is what counts, I can say that.

Our Instinctive Child knows what harms us. Our Considering Guardian (→) can help us realize that we have made progress, and affirm our successes. Our Integrative Guide can facilitate reasonable and appropriate decisions.

Elaine's Story

The rest of the weekend was agonizing for Elaine. She couldn't sleep or eat. She hadn't taken any time off after Sandy's accident. On Monday, she called her boss and asked to take a couple of personal days. Because things were in a slack period, her boss told her she could take time without any problem. She took the whole week, and she felt some of the pressure let up.

Monday afternoon, with the kids in school, all she could do was go over the problem in her mind and heart. What should she do? She loved Sandy, but she wouldn't and couldn't live with her if she was still an active drug user. Besides the emotional trauma, the threat to her own recovery, and the expense, Elaine was very much afraid Sandy's active drug use would open a door for Barry to win custody of the children.

Elaine wrote in her journal. She talked to friends. She prayed and meditated.

Elaine decided to do the Step Twelve reading. She was full of ideas and anxiety. The first card, which signified Elaine's spiritual awakening, was the 8 of Pentacles. This "master crafter's" card reassured her that she had been diligent in her work, and she needed to continue to practice. She could celebrate her achievements and continue to practice. As she focused on the card, she realized that financial considerations were not all that brought contentment to the worker in the picture. The worker got energy from the work and was being nurtured by knowing the work was valuable.

The second card, the reversed 10 of Wands, told Elaine the way to offer the opportunity to others was to quit carrying everyone else's burdens. She was not really surprised to see the codependency card showing up again, but the message was very clear that she needed to continue her spiral of recovery focusing on her own codependency.

The third card, the 7 of Wands, offered a way to practice in her life. She could claim the territory she had already won, and she could continue to stand against that which would harm her. She was encouraged that she did have the "ethical high ground," a result of having been diligent in working on her recovery.

Because money was a very urgent concern for Elaine, she decided to actually figure out what her finances would be like if Sandy weren't a part of the household. She wanted to see what would happen if she did "stand her ground," and insist that the household be drug- and alcohol-free. What would happen if she did take the emotional and financial risk of asking Sandy to move out? Just to be sure, she drew a final clarifying card—the 8 of cups, picturing a figure walking away from eight cups. It was time to move on.

As she went through the items of the "bill desk" and sorted them, she saw an opened and empty envelope that surprised her. It was from the unemployment bureau, stamped "Your quarterly benefit summary is enclosed." Sandy hadn't said anything about receiving unemployment. As far as Elaine knew, Sandy had had no income since the accident.

Perplexed and resentful, Elaine called Sandy's room at the hospital. The connection was fuzzy, but Sandy began speaking before Elaine identified herself.

ELAINE'S STEP TWELVE READING

"I'm having a hard time hearing you, Jeff. But I do have your money. I can't get to it until I get outta this place, but you can stop by day after tomorrow. Okay?" Elaine mumbled "Okay" and hung up.

She stared at the phone for a little while, then headed for the hospital. She knew where some of the money for the drugs had come from. She suspected a lot of other things as well. She felt herself getting all wound up in trying to find out the facts and making some judgments about how right or wrong everyone had been. She thought about the 8 of Pentacles again. This wasn't really her problem. All she needed to know was that she would not allow Sandy back into their home. The exact details of the past were not important. What counted was that she had made the decision, based on her own needs and the needs of Dusty and Hannah, for whom she was responsible.

When she arrived at Sandy's room, the doctor turned to her and said, "Sandy's doing well now, but this has set her back some. I'm going to send in the social worker after lunch to see what services we can arrange."

As he left, Sandy smiled a genuine greeting at Elaine. She said in a teasing tone, "Well, I guess you get to have me around the house for a while longer. It looks like I won't be back to work anytime soon. Do you think you can stand it?"

Elaine felt Sandy's charm, and the love they had for one another. And she felt her own determination.

"Sandy, I've got to talk to you about this. I don't think I *can* stand it. This is about me and the kids. I know it affects you, and I feel like a jerk doing this. I still love you, and I want to be with you. I can't and won't have you in the house now. I feel used, dirty, and crazy, just like I did when I was with Barry, and just like I did when you were using openly. I know you are using, and I don't care why. The bottom line is that you are not coming back to the house. I've been indulging my own addiction to taking care of people who can or should take care of themselves. During this whole time, I've felt so special and needed. I've been living in a fantasy. I've used every excuse and rationalization I know to not deal with reality. So now I'm trying to do better. Part of that is not enabling your addiction to drugs, or putting myself or my kids at risk."

Sandy began with denying everything. Elaine continued to say the same thing over and over. She loved Sandy, but would not allow her to

live in the house. Sandy tried a dramatic confession. She promised to quit, to go to meetings, to do anything, if Elaine would just give her another chance. Though it was very hard, Elaine stood her ground. The clarifying card in the Step Twelve Tarot reading, representing the insight or message, had been another eight, the 8 of Cups. The figure was walking away from a deeply emotional situation, toward the mountains, a symbol for Elaine of spiritual experience and practice. Two 8s reinforced the idea that this was a time to set priorities, to leave behind that which no longer served her, and to see that a cycle is coming to an end.

Elaine continued to express her sadness and her love, and to take her responsibility for her part of the problem. She also continued to refuse to let Sandy come back to the house.

Sandy then began to make excuses for what had happened. She managed to push every sympathy and empathy button that Elaine had—and Elaine had a lot of them. Elaine almost changed her mind.

The social worker came in. Sandy immediately began to tell him how hard it would be for her to make it alone, since Elaine was throwing her out. The social worker was full of understanding and sympathy. He turned to Elaine and asked for her side of things.

Elaine felt a surge of desire to justify herself and her actions, to feel understood. She remembered the third card of her reading, the 7 of wands, which showed her how to practice what she had learned. Like the figure in the card, her actions had important effects on others. She knew she had to continue to reclaim her life.

Elaine took a deep breath. As she let it out slowly, she looked directly at the social worker. "It is true that I am not willing to take Sandy home. I am not able to take care of her."

He asked her what had changed.

Elaine answered with a rueful smile. "Me, mostly. I've been working on my own recovery, and I won't go back to the way things were."

Sandy began explaining that she had reformed, that she'd never do drugs again, and that Elaine just wasn't giving her a chance.

Elaine agreed. "Sandy may well have begun the path of recovery. I don't know. What I do know is that I will not practice my addiction by living in a fantasy world."

The social worker asked what conditions would be necessary for Sandy to come back. Would it help if Sandy spent a week in a rehab facility after she was released from the hospital?

Elaine felt like she was fighting an uphill battle. Every time she thought she had reached the top, another steep path, filled with foes, opened up. She felt silly repeating herself.

"I don't know how to say this any other way. This is about me, and my kids, not about Sandy. I will not take Sandy back into the house. If I have to, because both our names are on the mortgage, I'll move out and we can sell the house. I won't consider living with Sandy until she lives a full year clean and sober. And then I'll have to be convinced that she's making real changes, not just having a 'flight into health.'"

Sandy almost spat out her next words. "What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to live? Who will take care of me while I'm disabled?"

Elaine looked at her. "I really don't know. It's not my responsibility. I didn't wrap the car around a tree because I was drunk. I didn't lie about unemployment. I didn't use the drugs. And I'm not going to keep harming myself, my kids, and you by pretending these things didn't happen or don't count."

"Get out. Just get out. I don't want to ever see your ugly face again."

Elaine looked at the social worker, who nodded. She was crying by the time she picked up her coat. Elaine touched the foot of the bed and said, "I'm really, really sorry. I love you, Sandy."

It was not as easy as just walking out of the hospital room. Their lives had been entwined for a long time. In the next weeks, Sandy moved back in with her parents while Elaine and the kids adjusted to the change of a household without her. Because of her increased household responsibilities, and her new commitment to time with Hannah and Dusty, Elaine decided to limit her time on the phone with her sister, Barb. Barb seemed to understand when Sandy and Elaine first separated. Over time, the calls came more frequently and the conversations took longer and longer. Elaine knew it wasn't Barb's fault. She was practicing her old addictive patterns.

Eventually Elaine had to be specific and precise. "Barb, you are my sister and I love you. I'm having an issue with my desires to take care of everyone else's feelings, even if they didn't ask me to do so. I feel guilty when I take time from Dusty, Hannah, or myself and talk on the phone for hours. I'm going to try to stop this pattern. I'm going to try setting a timer for fifteen minutes when I get on the phone, and limit myself in that way. Would you help me by reminding me when you hear the timer go off?"

Barb was a little confused, but she readily agreed. A few weeks later, during a conversation on the phone, Elaine heard a timer go off. "What's that?"

Barb responded. "I liked your idea so much that I decided to do the same thing. I'm limiting myself to ten minutes. Would you help me like I helped you?"

A bit surprised, Elaine said she'd be happy to help and said a prompt farewell. She found herself feeling good about hanging up, like she had done something helpful, both by providing an example and by establishing her own boundaries.

Though she was able to congratulate herself for setting and enforcing this boundary, Elaine also struggled with feeling depressed and alone. She and Sandy used e-mail to work out an arrangement. Elaine couldn't afford to buy Sandy out of the mortgage just then. Sandy agreed that the children deserved to stay in what had become their home. Elaine decided she could hold off on making a decision about it until a few months had passed. Elaine would pack up Sandy's furniture and personal stuff and store it in the garage for her, so that she would have familiar things available when she moved into her own place. For now, this was okay.

With the separation, Elaine and Sandy both discovered how much they cared for each other. They both discovered how much their relationship had changed over time, and how much their addictions had come between them. They discovered that their relationship needed a more solid foundation, one that involved lots of work both personally and as a couple.

Phil's Story

Phil had spent a lot of effort trying to understand and work with the Step Ten concept of the Wraith of Self-Harm. Over time, he had fantasized that the world at large owed him something because he had such a "streak of bad luck." He was able to figure out that this behavior and attitude had harmed him and others when he was in treatment for substance abuses. He recognized and worked with some more of this when he focused on his gambling addiction, and he still struggled with the idea that he was projecting his own fears and untrustworthiness onto others.

His friendship with Sean gave him a way to work on this. Every time Phil made a negative comment about anyone or anything, Sean would ask him how he was like what he was criticizing. It got to be almost a joke between them.

"I wish they had put more mayonnaise on this sandwich. And no, I don't see myself deficient in mayonnaise-putting," Phil said at the restaurant where they usually had dinner after a meeting.

"Actually I do see a problem," responded Sean. "It's not with mayonnaise, but it is with not checking with others to see what they want. I've noticed that you just assume what I want without checking with me."

"Give me a break, Sean. Do I have to ask you every time if you want regular or decaf coffee? You always take regular. I just get you a cup to be helpful and show you how much I appreciate your friendship."

"No, you always *give* me regular. When is the last time you saw me drink coffee at a meeting? I haven't wanted to bring it up because you get so snarly when you are trying to be helpful and someone criticizes you."

This led to a discussion about Step Ten, and eventually to a shared ritual, where Sean worked on his self-harming behavior of keeping silent when he should speak, and Phil worked on assumptions he made about others. As he worked in the ritual, he recognized the Wraith of Self-Harm as a mirror, and female, image of himself. He knew that many of his harmful actions and attitudes were aimed at aspects he disliked in himself.

A few of the regulars in the Pagan recovery group created an e-mail list and posted a brief version of their meditations and what they had discovered in the process. They had decided they needed some extra anonymity. They wanted to know that they were speaking to people who did practice the Pagan 12-Step recovery. They used the names of animals they felt particularly close to as their identities in the group, and only the moderator, an old-time member, knew who was really who. Phil, posting as "Buzzard," found that the animal names helped him read what others had written without getting involved in their personalities. More important, he knew that there were women out there, but sexuality did not play a role in this list. He felt very free to be where he was spiritually and emotionally.

To celebrate his one-year anniversary in the Pagan 12-Step group, he asked Sean, Carl, and his sister-in-law Stacey to be his guests for a

concert, and he drove them all to the club in his car. The parking lot was in the next block. It was icy out, and Stacey was wearing high heels to match her short red dress. Phil dropped them all off at the entrance and told them to go on in. He'd meet them at the seats.

On his way into the theater, he slipped on the ice. A hand reached out to steady him, and he automatically said, "Thanks." He smiled, and went on inside.

He didn't realize until he was almost at his seat that the helper had been a very attractive woman. In the past, he would have automatically seized on such an opportunity to get to know her better, offering to take her out as a way of thanking her for her help, finding some pretext to get her phone number and make another conquest. After the work he'd done, this seemed like a victory—he'd been able to respond appropriately, thinking about her as a fellow human being who'd reached out to him in kindness, rather than prey to be consumed and cast aside. He told Sean about what had happened. Carl took the opportunity to needle him and to express some of his own fears.

"What?" said Carl. "My little brother didn't try to hit on her? Do you believe this, Sean? Can I stop worrying about Phil hitting on Stacey now?"

Phil laughed with the rest, but what Carl had said hit home. The next day, he decided to do a Step Twelve reading, just to see what would happen.

The first card, the High Priestess, represented his spiritual awakening. He had come to see women as sacred, as beings in their own right. He was relying more on his intuition and had come to see that he himself also had a "female" aspect. He was beginning to understand the sacredness of the interactions between the two pillars, called Severity and Mercy. He also saw that the value of the High Priestess was not related to her outward gender.

The way Phil could offer this opportunity to others was represented by the second card, the Fool. He knew it was helpful to leave behind the baggage that no longer served him. The image of the dog reminded him of the importance of faithfulness. The cliff in front reminded him of the short distance from falling back into the abyss of addiction.

To practice these principles, he was going to have to take action, represented by the third card, the Tower. Phil was a bit amused, because he had always felt close to the Tower. He knew he liked being the one

PHIL'S STEP TWELVE READING

who toppled the established order of things, and he particularly enjoyed seeing others get (in his mind) their just deserts. He had learned that to continue his recovery he needed to topple the established order of his addictions and remember both the Rede and the Rule of Three. He looked again at the card, and noticed the lightning, symbol of Divine intervention. He could recognize that the Divine ones had indeed given him the start he needed by deflating his pride.

As Phil reflected he admitted he did find Stacey attractive, both because she shared his interest in recovery and even more so because she was "safe." He could see that he had been carefully weaving a web of sympathy around her, designed to have her draw closer to him and away from Carl. He didn't like what he was recognizing in himself. He became more and more unsettled, and he called Sean.

"What about doing the Step Twelve ritual?" asked Sean.

"I don't trust my spiritual hearing alone," answered Phil. "Would you have some time in the next few days to do it with me?"

They decided to get together the following week. On the day before they had agreed to meet, Sean called to say he had to unexpectedly work out of town for the next few days. Was there anything he could do the make it up to Phil?

Fortunately, over the weekend Phil had already read through the ritual and prepared what he wanted to say. "No, actually I'll be all right. I think I know what needs to be done. Thanks, anyway. I'll let you know what happens."

Thus, Phil decided to go ahead with the ritual. He turned off the phone and did his preparations. After casting the circle, he went to each quarter, and spoke out loud what he saw as spiritual awakenings. As during the other rituals he had performed, no bells or whistles sounded off when he listened. This time, though, he was aware of a sense of approval and encouragement coming from each quarter. As he talked about what he intended to do in the East and the South, that sense deepened.

When he came to the West, he spoke of the encounter with the woman who had helped him and of the insights he had from the High Priestess card. He stated his intention to draw very careful boundaries around what he said to Stacey, being aware of his tendencies and her attractiveness. There was approval, but it didn't seem as strong as that he had experienced in the East and the South. He remembered the

images on the Tower card, with its two people going in different directions. He saw this as a warning not to be alone with her, even for "good reason." He said that aloud, and the approval deepened. He finished the ritual and felt satisfied.

When he talked to Sean two nights later, he told him about his experiences. Sean was very encouraging and told him he was doing the right thing. He was much less likely to slip if he stayed out of slippery places. Watching his words with Stacey—and not being alone with her—were very good ideas.

A couple of months later, Phil was very pleased to see a face he recognized at the 12-Step meeting. It was the woman who had helped him at the theater! At first he saw this as the Divine rewarding him for being a good boy, like the toy surprise in his cosmic box of Cracker Jack. Very quickly, he realized that meeting her wasn't a reward but a test, a real opportunity to practice his recovery.

Over time, they got to know each other as people. She might be adorable, she might even be attracted to him, but she was also a person, and if he couldn't treat her like one, he knew he'd end up causing more hurt than happiness—not only for her, but for himself. Their friendship deepened, and one day they just might allow that to blossom into something else.

Summary

Steps Eleven and Twelve are not the end. They are the beginning of another spiral toward recovery.

Step Eleven shows us a way to keep moving in our recovery on a regular basis. By keeping regular checks on ourselves, and short accounts on our amends list, we can move around the spiral unimpeded by things that no longer serve us.

Step Twelve recognizes that we have done a great deal of work and made a great many changes. The hope that we experience and that we can offer to others is real. We do this by example as well as active involvement.

We have all the tools of the steps to help us. We have the Divine Presence, others, and ourselves.

We are becoming serene in accepting the things we cannot change, courageous in changing the things we can, and wiser in knowing the difference.

CONCLUSION

The Journey of Love

We've come a long way from the dawning notion that our lives were overwhelming. We investigated how the effect of our behaviors and attitudes could be compared to the ethical idea of "harm none, do as you will." Harm to ourselves or others is becoming the standard by which we evaluate what we choose.

By enlarging our world, by including others as well as a Divine Presence, we began to experience hope that we could indeed reclaim our lives. We tentatively began to understand the depth of harm we had done to others and ourselves by placing something between ourselves and reality. We discovered, or rediscovered, ourselves as spiritual beings who are directly affected by many factors.

Realizing that we could not begin the spiral of recovery alone, we acknowledged our needs and asked for help. We became very aware that our beliefs and our pasts were still a living part of our present lives. We needed wisdom that was beyond what we alone held. This act of connecting, of seeing and being seen, continued the awakening of our spiritual selves and helped us become more connected to Divine Reality.

Once we had turned away from some parts of our isolation and fear, and toward spiritual help, we began to evaluate our lives and our experiences in terms of harm and help. We began the process of honest

reflection, and old patterns of harmful behavior began to emerge from the chaos of our lives. We sought to move away from denial, hopelessness, and misery. We became clearer and clearer that we were far out of balance. We began to sense the freedom that comes along with truth.

As we discussed what we discovered with others, and with the Divine Presence, we began to build the bridges that would allow us to invite transformation into our spirits. We knew that we were only as sick as our secrets. We began the lifelong process of telling the truth to ourselves and others.

Once we had cleared some of the underbrush of our pasts by holding them up to the light of reason and truth, we found that those things *had* served us at one time. We were rather surprised to discover that we could not simply rid ourselves of things that were no longer desirable. We needed to find a new way to live in our world. We understood that if we did not have something ready to replace our old patterns, we would—eventually—return to them.

We may have tried over and over, with insight and determination, and action, to change ourselves. As we have traveled the Recovery Spiral, we experience how important these preparations are. Without them, we are not in a position to be transformed. We discover that the transformation is something that we cannot do alone; we must ask for help once again to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

Acting in faith that we and the Divine have done our parts, we looked for ways to rebalance the scales that our addictions had tipped. We learned that we do not *have* to do this. We *get* to do this.

Once we knew what needed to be done, we realistically considered the consequences of what we had imagined. We tried to be especially careful not to add to the harm already done. Sometimes this part of recovery was not possible because of circumstances beyond our control. Here we found ourselves trusting that the Divine would let us know when and how we could make things even.

Having done what we could to change our lives and make up for what we could, we made amends to ourselves by continuing to work on a program of recovery by examining ourselves, our attitudes, and our actions regularly.

Further, we deepened our spiritual practices by regular attention to our own spirits and by seeking greater understanding of our own beliefs and connections.

Finally, we showed our gratitude to those who had been there for us when we needed them by trying to be there for others who needed to hear this message of hope, freedom, and joy.

This entire journey has one theme: love. We learn that in loving ourselves, we can love others. In loving others, we can love ourselves. Love touches our deepest selves. Love calls forth the Divine, in ourselves and in others.

Spiral Recovery

As we have said many times in this book, recovery is a spiral. When we continue to work the 12-Step program, we continue to grow. At times, life or circumstances interfere with practicing self-examination, gratitude, and service every day. What starts out as one or two days becomes a week, a month, or more. Over time, and not usually all at once, we discover that once again our lives have become overwhelming.

This does not mean that we failed the first time or that the steps did not work. They got us to the place where we can see our problems, a place where we can learn new ways to change harmful patterns. We don't have to punish ourselves by setting and trying to follow unbearably strict rules. We have the opportunity to use the steps again, to rediscover love, and to renew our spirits.

We know that we need to go back to some or all of the steps when we notice flashing red warning lights in our lives:

- Using the substance or process we identify as a problem for us is a flare-lit warning that our addictions are back in full force. We begin by applying common sense to move away from situations that connect us to harmful or addictive patterns. For instance, if we are sex addicts, joining a sex-magic circle is not helpful.
- Finding ourselves in ethical dilemmas that are similar in some way to the ones we have worked with means that it is time to dig deeper. Even if I have the money, if I am still unsure about whether to bail my high priest out again, I need to look at my codependency as an ethical problem.
- Feeling crazy, fearing for our safety or the safety of those in our care, or feeling suicidal, homicidal, or depressed are emotional indicators that we need help. Any extremely intense emotion, experi-

enced for more than a few moments, means it is time to get help, now.

- Finding new ways to keep from experiencing reality means that our old addictive pattern is still active. We may substitute new addictions for old ones and find new ways to keep from experiencing reality. If we have been money drunks, we might switch to an addictive use of religion. The process is the same and still results in an imbalance.
- Creating crises, or withdrawing from them, means that we are again dodging reality. Pretending that we don't notice doesn't make reality go away. Getting upset about coven politics when our child is caught stealing does not change the reality.

The Future

Problems will occur. I promise.

Solutions will also occur, however. The more ready we are to receive the solutions, the more loving the solutions can be. The less we rely on addictive patterns to solve our dilemmas, the less we will find ourselves overwhelmed.

As Pagans, we find a primary source of wisdom and guidance in the natural world. We practice valuing our time, energy, and resources, as well as those of others and the world around us. We know we cannot disregard others or the world without dire consequences. We seek to find ways to benefit one another when we make decisions. We know that there is reciprocity among all in a relationship, whether overt or covert. We realize that emotional honesty means struggle, and thereby growth. We accept the responsibility for our choices. We try to balance ourselves with others and our world.

The 12-Step Recovery Spiral offers one way to continue our journey.

Pagan 12-Step Groups

There may not be a Pagan 12-Step group in your area. You can privately use the Pagan 12 Steps at regular twelve-step meetings, if they are helpful to you. Another way to solve this problem is to start a Pagan meeting yourself. Doing this in person is preferable. Sometimes the only option

is to meet online. Try it for three months. If it helps, if you are finding growth and development as people and as Pagans, you may want to continue.

There are many twelve-step recovery groups, most of which use a set of "traditions" as a template for running their meetings. I've also included an introduction and template that has been used over the years, but feel free to suit yourself. This is your program. It's your recovery. Enjoy it.

RECOVERY SPIRAL TAROT MANUAL

Introduction

Tarot is one of many systems for taking counsel. Of course you are free to use any other system of consultation you like. I've chosen tarot because many people will find it familiar, and I've used it for many years. The positions, and what they represent in each reading, can be used by themselves as questions for you or someone else to answer without using divination.

You can use a deck you already have, or choose one that seems good to you. One way to do this is to look at several decks and then allow your intuition to speak to you. If you can't decide, ask someone at the store to arrange your favorites in a random order. Keep your eyes closed and allow yourself to be drawn to the energy of the deck by passing your hand a couple of inches over the decks. Realize that the physical sensation may be small. It may be that one deck feels colder or warmer than the others. You may know intuitively that the one you want is the first on the right without using your hands at all. This is an interesting way to become familiar with your own psychic potential.

Prepare yourself, your space, and your deck in a way that is comfortable for you. To instill energy into a deck for a particular reading, some people simply spend a moment focusing on their concerns, while others light candles, sprinkle salt, or arrange crystals with elaborate care. I push out my inner circle (see *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*, Step Two), imagine the deck filled with wisdom, and get going. One useful idea is to establish some sort of simple ritual act to get you into a contemplative mental state suitable for this kind of work. Choose something that has meaning for you and that you can repeat every time you tackle this part of your recovery.

You may shuffle the deck randomly or in a specific pattern. You may choose cards from the top, the bottom, or one at a time from anywhere in the deck. I like the random shuffle and draw best, but I've had excel-

lent results with shuffling three times, and with cutting to the right three times. Again—this is your program. You choose.

After you have done your reading, you may wish to cleanse your deck of the energy by closing your eyes for a moment, then imagining water or energy or light pouring through your deck until it "feels" clean.

When you are doing a reading, look for any consistency of number, suit, or items pictured in the cards. Buy one or several books about your cards and read directly from them. When I teach people to read, I encourage them to look up the meanings of the cards as they are doing the readings for themselves or for others and to allow their intuition and the card images to help them find the meaning of a particular card in a particular place.

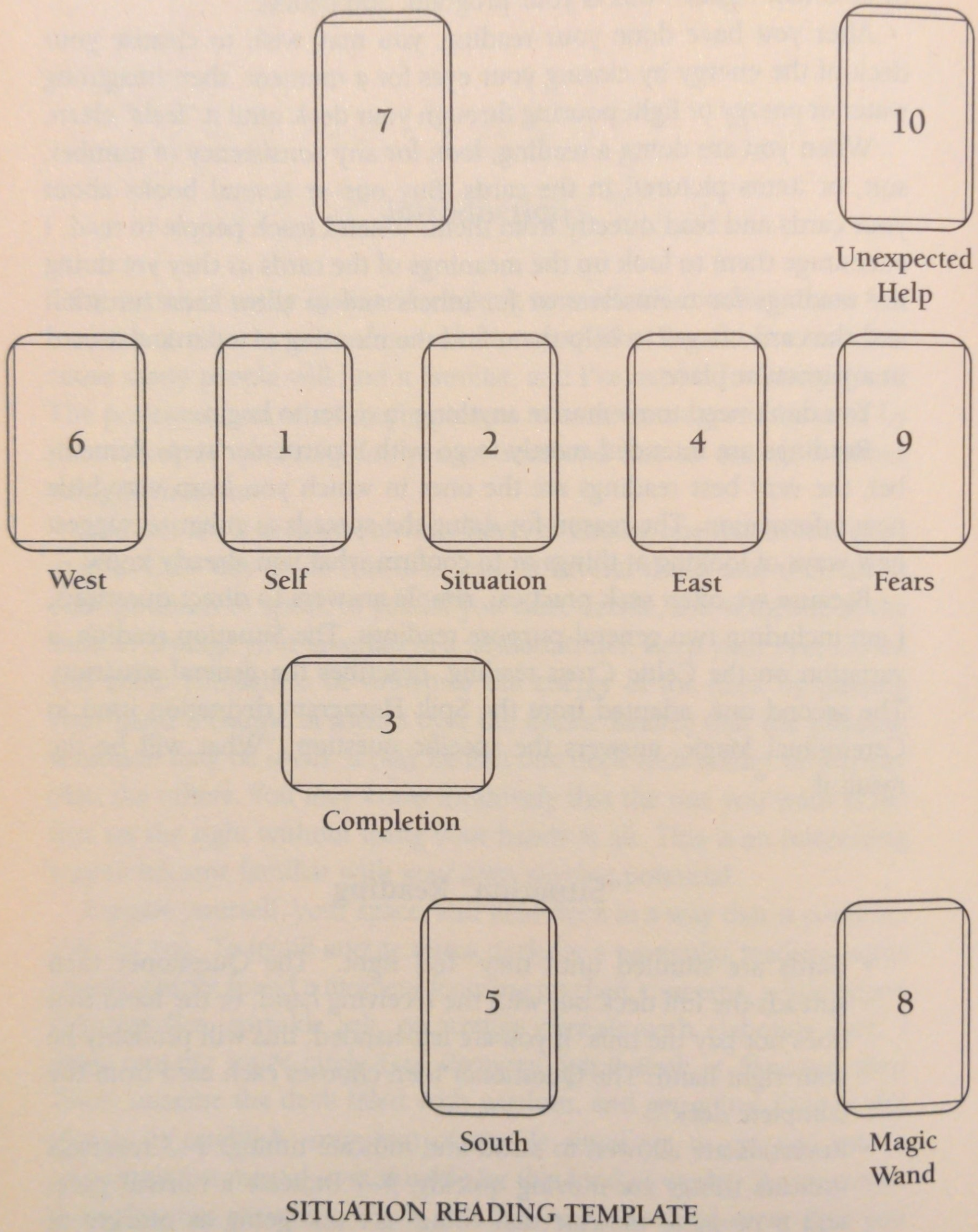
You don't need to memorize anything in order to begin.

Readings are intended mostly to go with a particular step. Remember, the very best readings are the ones in which you learn very little new information. The reason for doing the spreads is either to suggest new ways of looking at things or to confirm what you already know.

Because we often seek practical, simple answers to direct questions, I am including two general-purpose readings. The Situation reading, a variation on the Celtic Cross reading, describes the general situation. The second one, adapted from the Spilt Hexagram divination used in Ceremonial Magic, answers the specific question, "What will be the result if . . ."

"Situation" Reading

- Cards are shuffled until they "feel right." The Questioner then spreads the full deck out with the receiving hand, or the hand that does not pay the bills. If you are left-handed, this will probably be your right hand. The Questioner then chooses each card from the complete deck.
- Reversals are allowed to stand and indicate timing: 1–3 reversals indicate things are moving quickly, 3–7 indicate a normal pace, and 8 or more indicate that things are not going as quickly as anticipated.
- Normal distribution indicates 2 or 3 or each minor arcana suit, and trump or major arcana suit. Notice if there are more than 3 in a suit, or none at all.



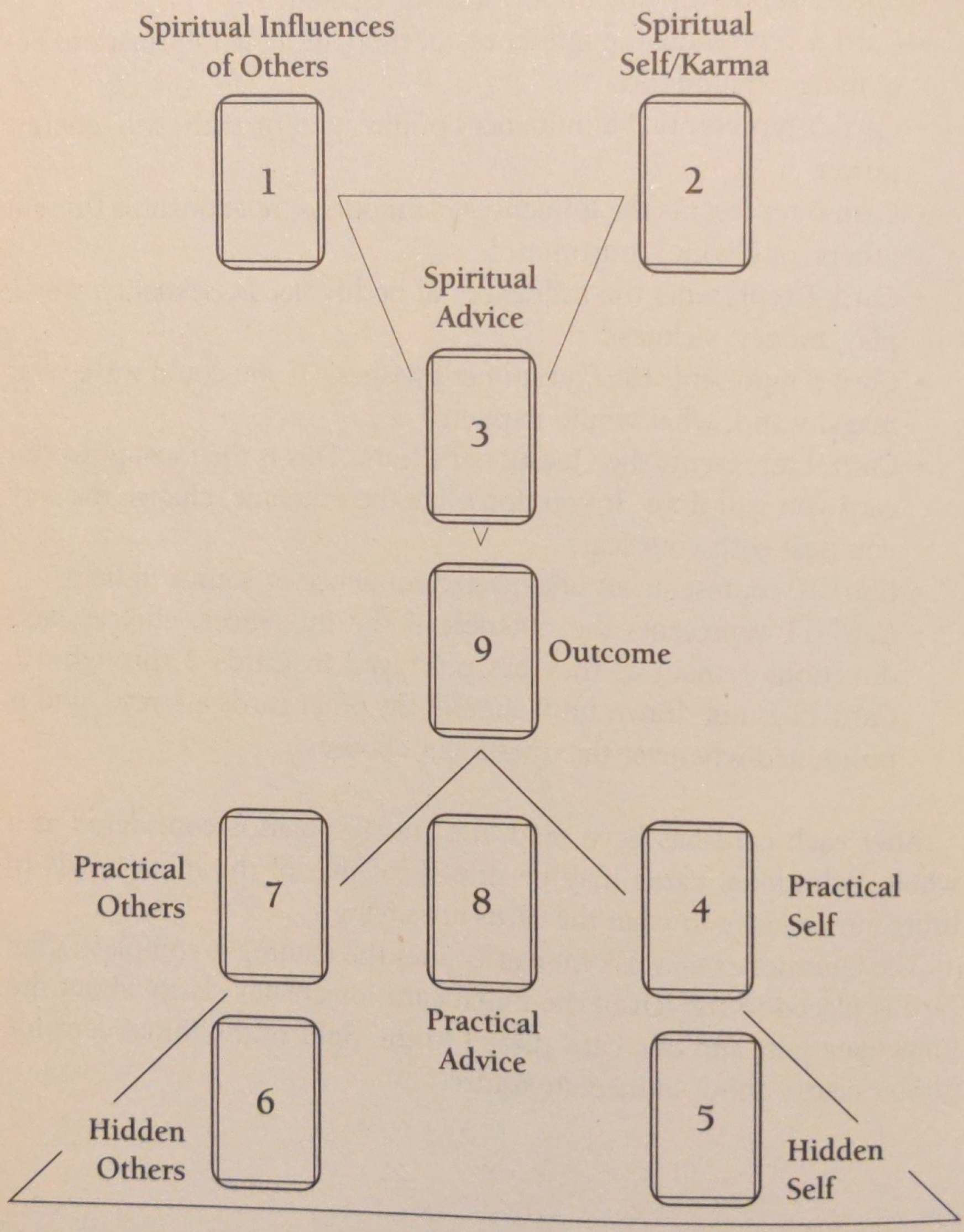
SITUATION READING TEMPLATE

- Card 1 represents the Questioner.
- Card 2 represents the situation in general.
- Card 3 represents the opportunity or challenge.
- Card 4 represents the influences of thought, new information, beginnings, boundaries.
- Card 5 represents the influences of direction or path, will, energy, power.
- Card 6 represents the influences of emotions, relationships (to self, others, or Divine), nurturance.
- Card 7 represents the influences of bodily needs, sexuality, work, play, money, sickness.
- Card 8 represents the Questioner's wishes. (If you could wave your magic wand, what would happen?)
- Card 9 represents the Questioner's fears. This is the most powerful card you will draw. If you don't like the outcome, change the way you deal with your fears.
- Card 10 represents an unexpected influence or source of help.
- Card 11 represents the outcome if the influences, choices, and directions remain as they are portrayed in Cards 2 through 10. Card 11 is not drawn until after all the other cards are read, and is positioned wherever the questioner chooses.

After each card has been read, the entire spread is considered as a whole. Additional cards may be drawn for one of the initial cards to bring more clarity to what the cards are saying.

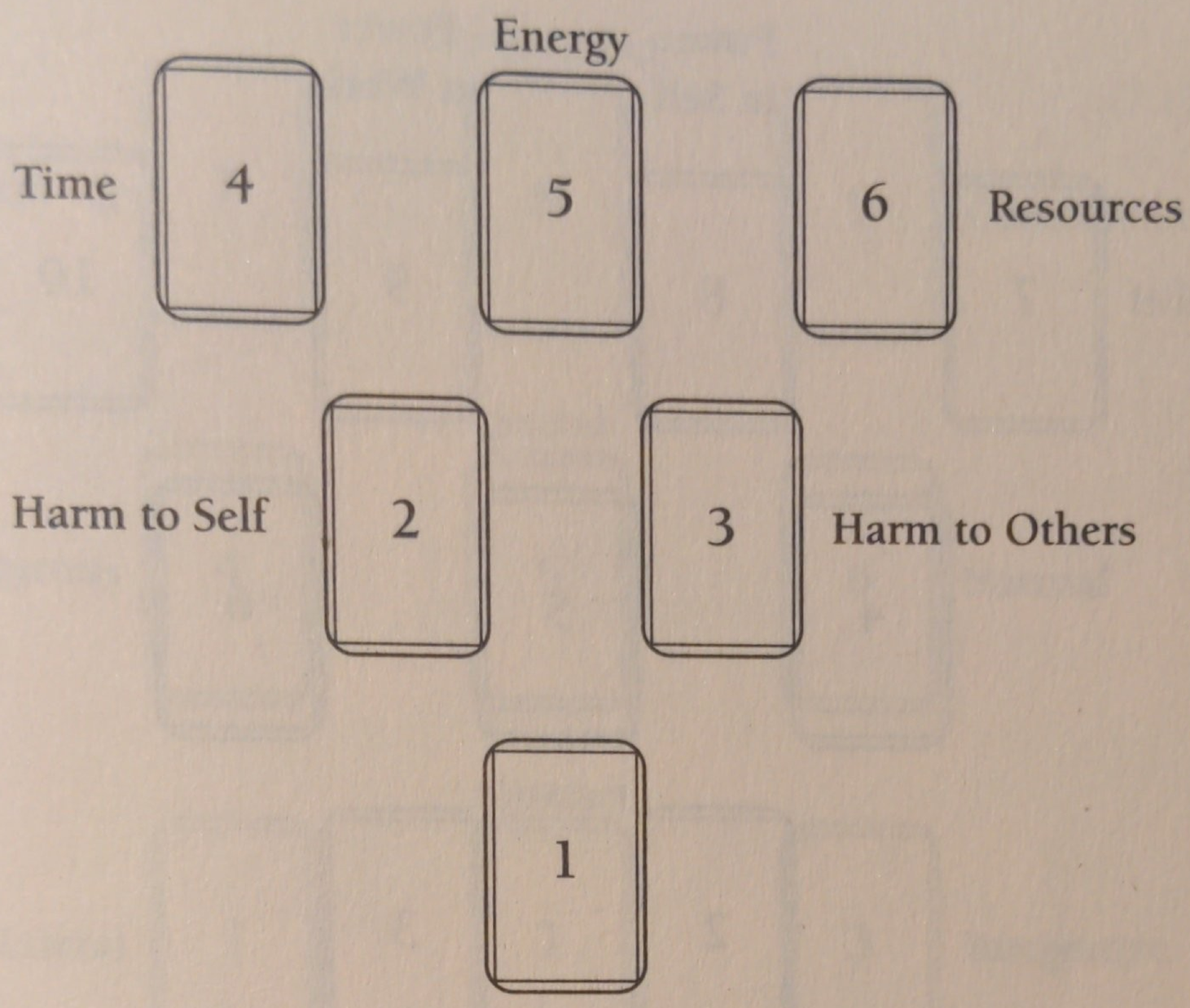
The Questioner may ask for clarity after the reading is complete. One card is placed to the left of the initial card for greater clarity about the immediate past and one card placed to the right of the initial card for greater clarity about immediate future.

What will be the result if _____?



WHAT IF . . . READING TEMPLATE

STEP ONE READING TEMPLATE

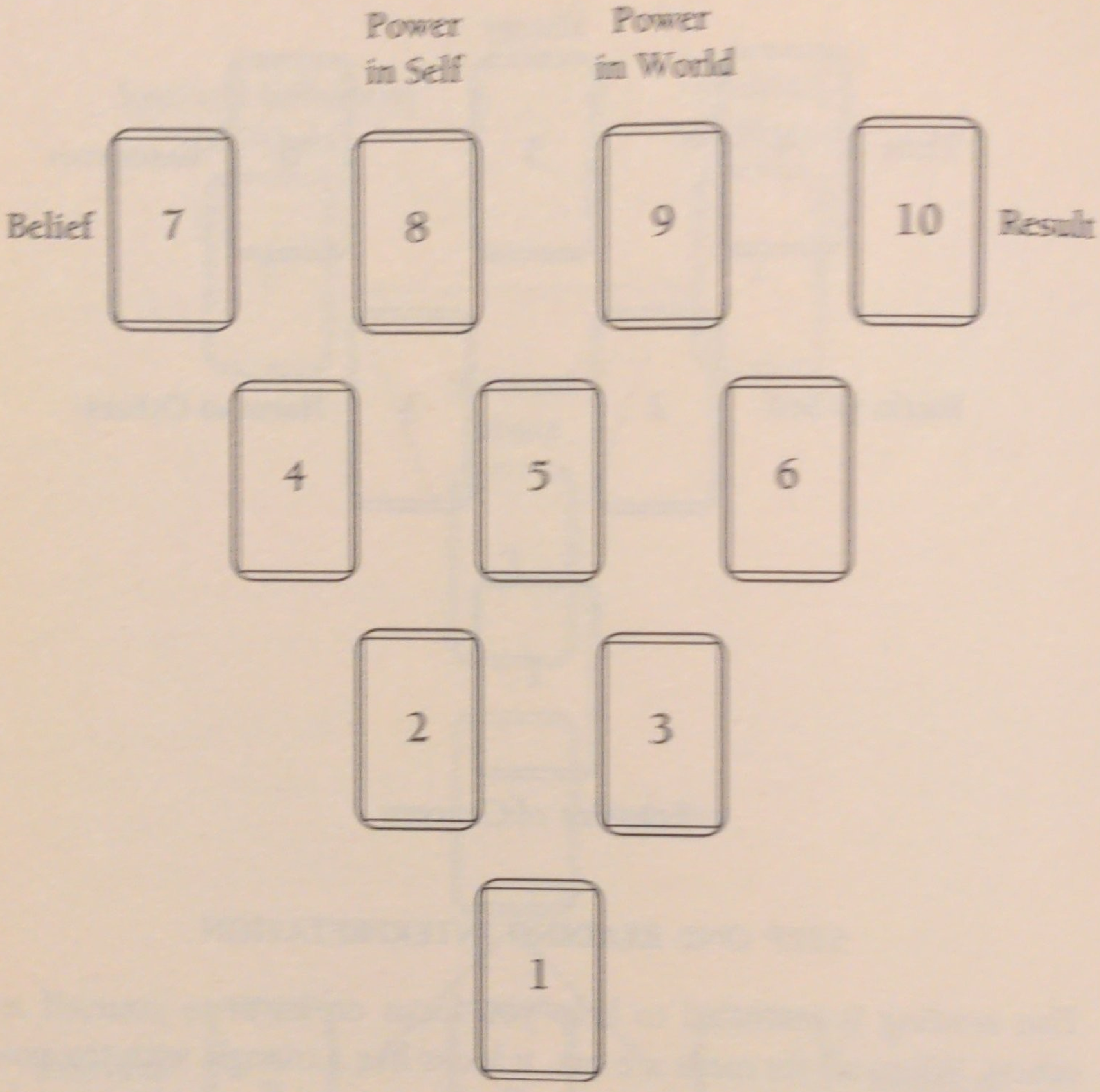


STEP ONE READING INTERPRETATION

This reading is intended to help you focus on harm to yourself and others. When all six cards are out, it looks like a triangle with the point down. It is a good idea to write down the cards and your interpretation so you remember what you noticed. This reading forms the basis for the readings for Steps Two and Three. Each behavior that concerns you can have its own reading.

- The first card is the point of an inverted triangle and represents the behavior that is concerning you.
- The second and third cards are placed side by side, balancing at the top of the first card. The second card represents harm to you, and the third represents harm to others.
- Cards four, five, and six form a third line, placed at the top of the previous line. Card four represents time. Card five represents energy. Card six represents resources.

STEP TWO READING TEMPLATE



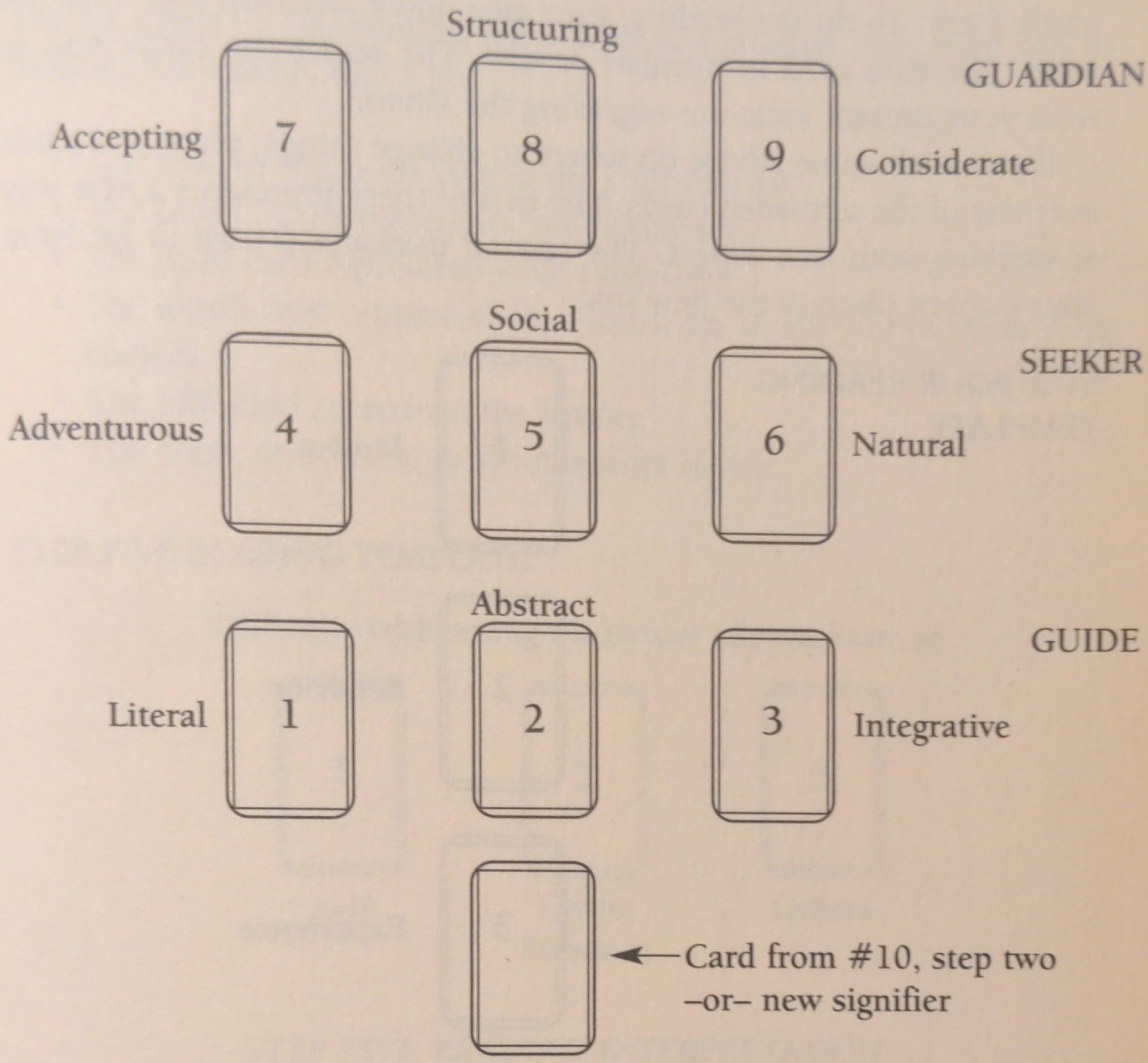
STEP TWO READING INTERPRETATION

Building on the Step One pyramid, choose four more cards to balance on top of the six already-chosen cards.

You may either use a reading you have already done or draw a new reading using the Step One instructions.

- The first new card, placed on the top left, represents your belief.
- The second card talks about the power within yourself.
- The third card is about power within your world.
- The fourth and final card is the result.

STEP THREE READING TEMPLATE



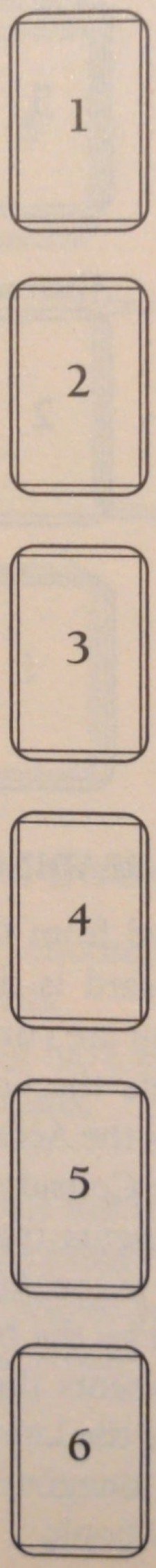
STEP THREE READING INTERPRETATION

- Take the Outcome card from the Step Two reading, or choose a card intuitively. This card is the "base card" and represents the image of the Divine you are currently dealing with.
- The top row represents the Guardian aspect of you and of the Divine. The first card is the Accepting Guardian, then the Structuring Guardian, then the Considerate Guardian.
- The middle row represents the Seeker aspect of you and of the Divine. The first card is the Adventurous Seeker, the second the Social Seeker, followed by the Natural Seeker.
- The bottom row represents the Guide aspect of you and of the Divine. The first card is the Literal Guide, followed by the Abstract Guide, and finally the Integrative Guide, described in Step Three in the main text of this book.

You now have nine cards in a tic-tac-toe pattern and one card underneath them. To do the reading, turn face down any card that does not match the base card in number or suit. The remaining cards read as what your present ideas are regarding the Divine.

If you wish some advice on where to change things, place two cards over any of the upturned cards. The first of these represents a new way of working with that aspect. The second indicates a path to get from your current place to the new one.

STEP FOUR READING TEMPLATE



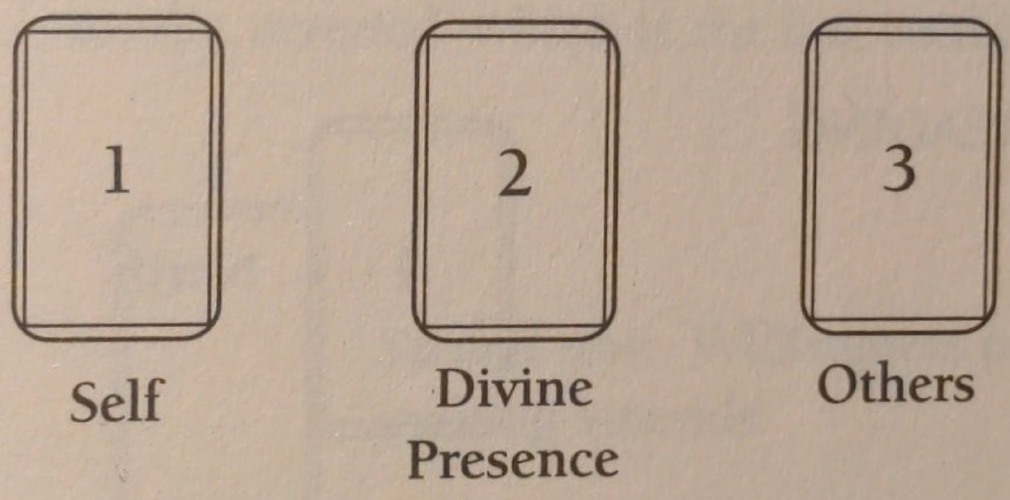
STEP FOUR READING INTERPRETATION

The six cards in this reading are placed in a straight line, from top to bottom, just exactly like a list.

- The first, or top, card represents your motive.
- The second card represents your behavior.
- The third card represents your experience.
- The fourth card represents the ethic from which you've made your choices.
- The fifth card represents the lesson.
- The sixth, or bottom, card represents advice.

STEP FIVE READING TEMPLATE

Difficulty with seeing the nature of your harm to

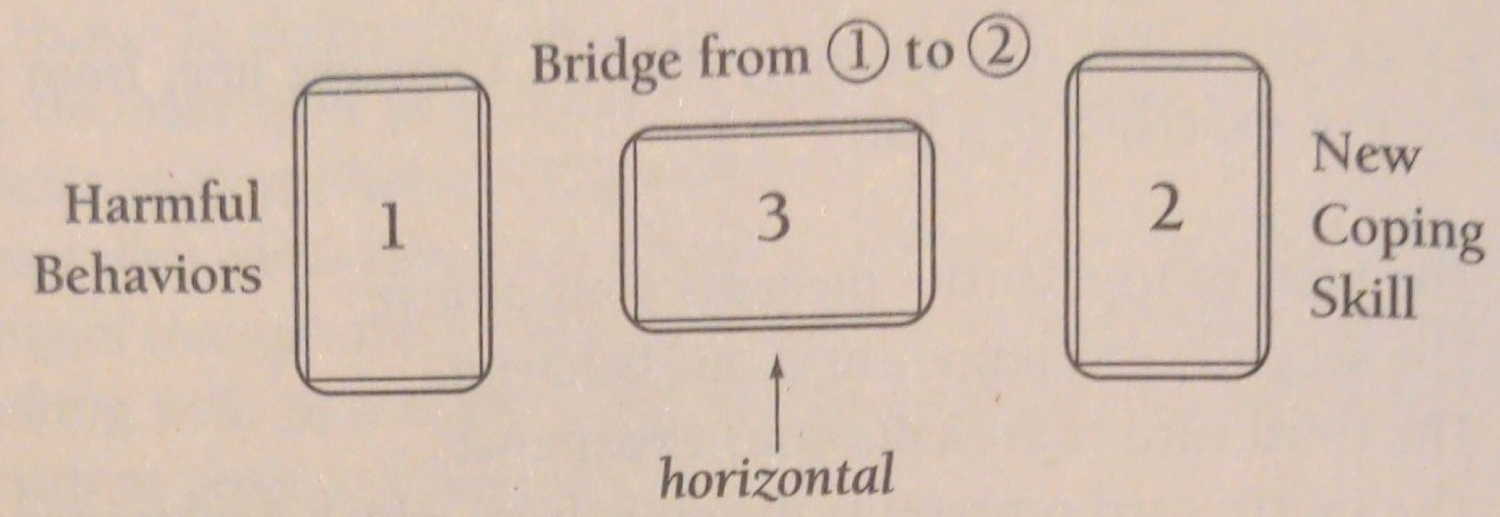


STEP FIVE READING INTERPRETATION

The three cards in this reading are placed in a simple line from left to right.

- The first card represents your difficulty with admitting the nature of your harm to yourself.
- The second card represents your difficulty with admitting the nature of your harm to the Divine Presence.
- The third card represents your difficulty with admitting the nature of your harm to others.

STEP SIX READING TEMPLATE

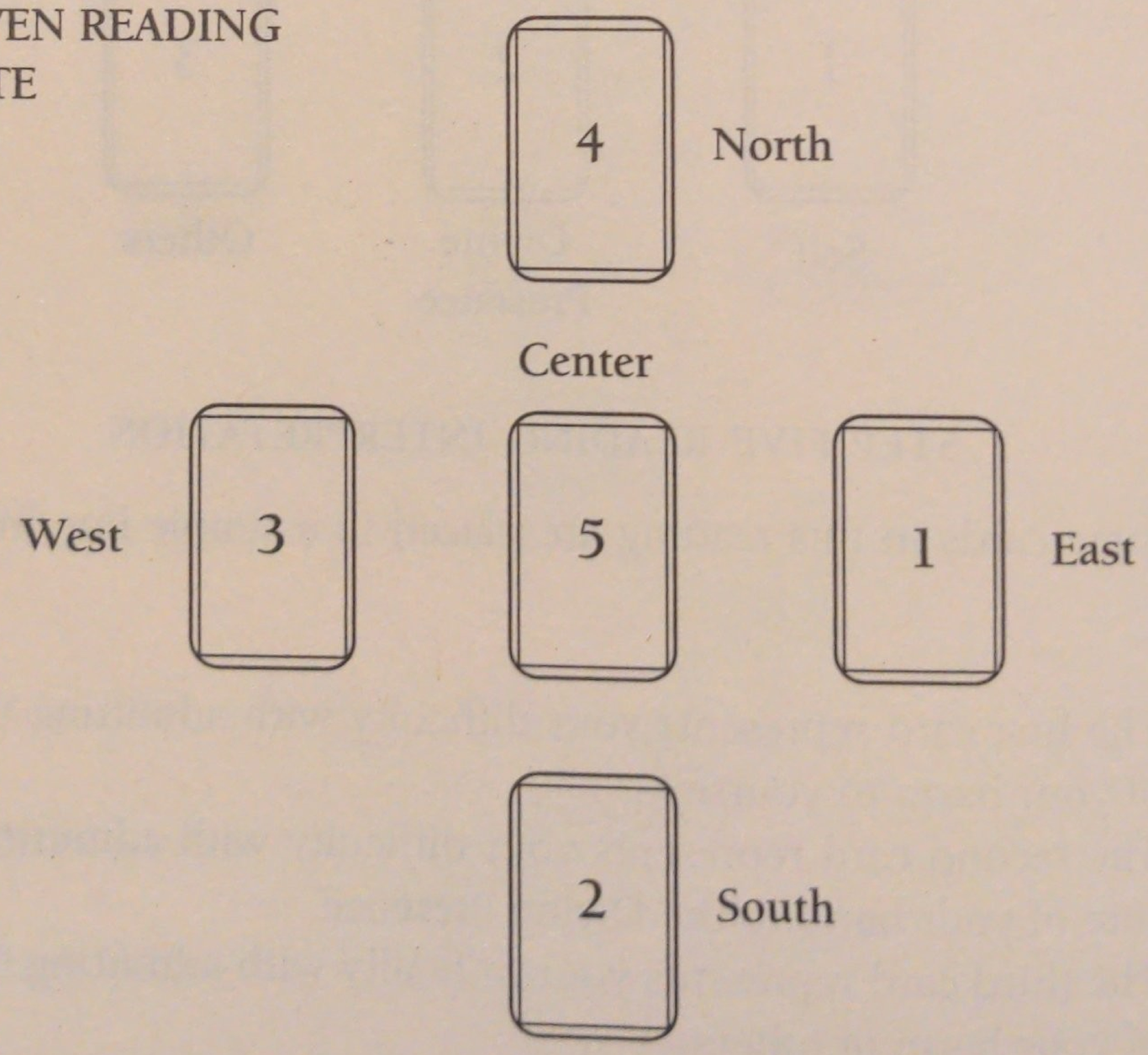


STEP SIX READING INTERPRETATION

This reading consists of three cards. The first card is placed on the left, the second on the right, and the third on its side between them.

- The first card represents your harmful behaviors.
- The second card represents your new coping skill.
- The third card represents the way to get from one to the other.

STEP SEVEN READING TEMPLATE

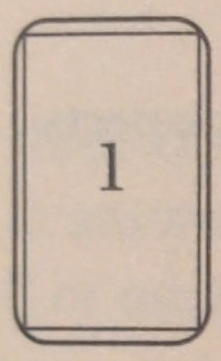


STEP SEVEN READING INTERPRETATION

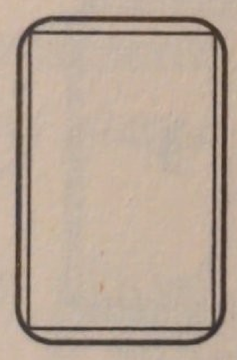
The five cards in this reading are placed to look like the wheel of the inner circle, as described in the Ritual for Step Two in the *Recovery Spiral Book of Shadows*.

- The first card, placed on the right, represents what the East recommends for you.
- The second card, placed on the bottom, represents what the South recommends for you.
- The third card, placed on the left, represents what the West has for you.
- The fourth card, placed on the top, represents what the North has for you.
- The fifth card, placed in the middle, represents what the Center has for you.

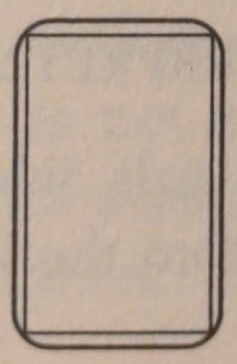
STEP EIGHT READING TEMPLATE



Harm you have done . . .
. . . until a reversal, which is the last card in this row



Second row: **Willingness or difficulty making amends**



Third row: **Amends you need to make**

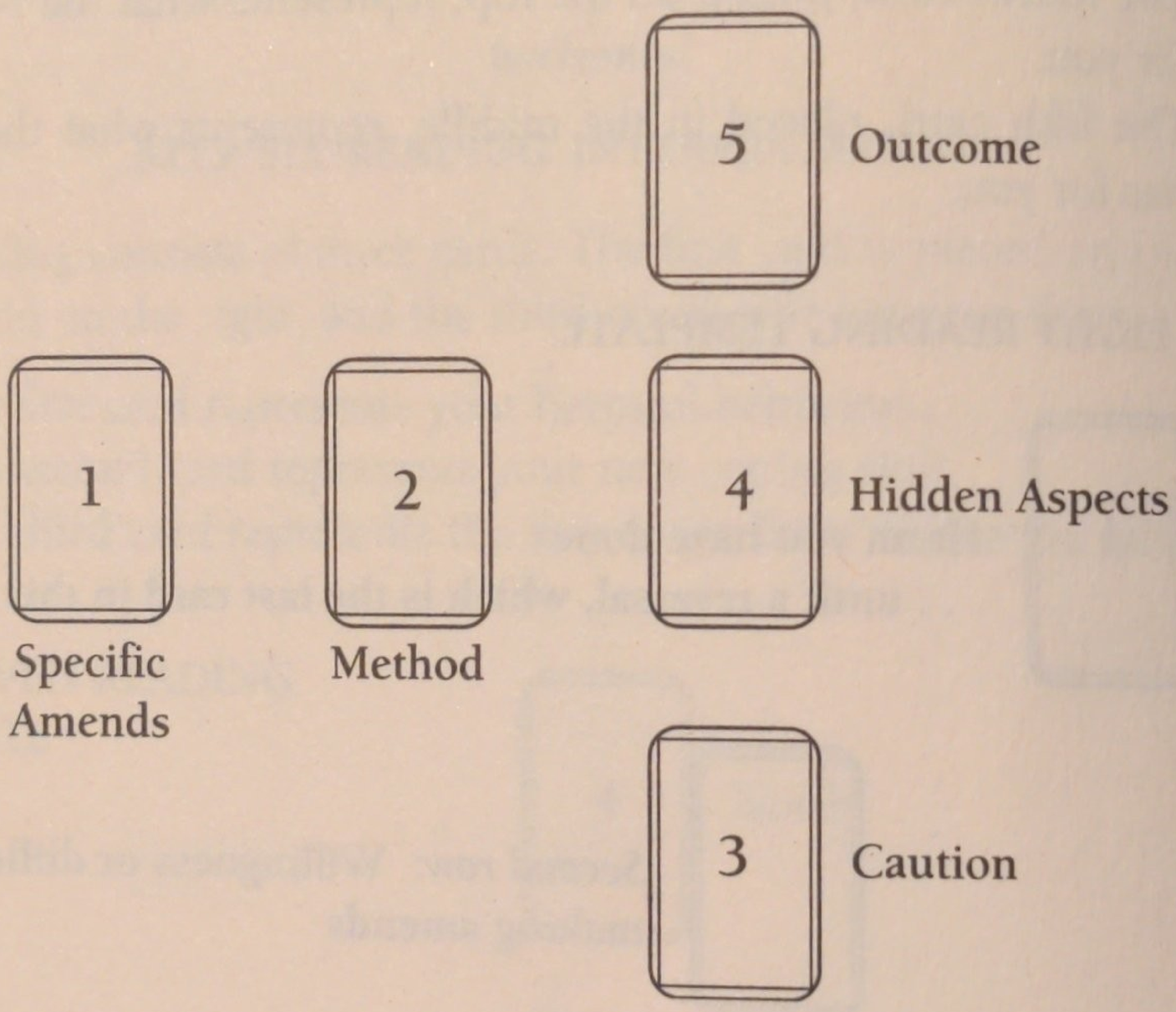
STEP EIGHT READING INTERPRETATION

This reading is either a straight line from top to bottom or some form of the letter **T**. The top row describes the harm that you have done. Before you spread the cards, choose who or what you have harmed—yourself, others, your world.

- The first card and the rest of the top row represent the harm you have done. Continue to turn cards over until you get a reversed card, leaving the reversed card at the end of the top row.

- The second row comprises only one card. It represents your willingness to make amends or your difficulties in making them.
- The third row includes only one card. It represents the amends you need to make.

STEP NINE READING TEMPLATE

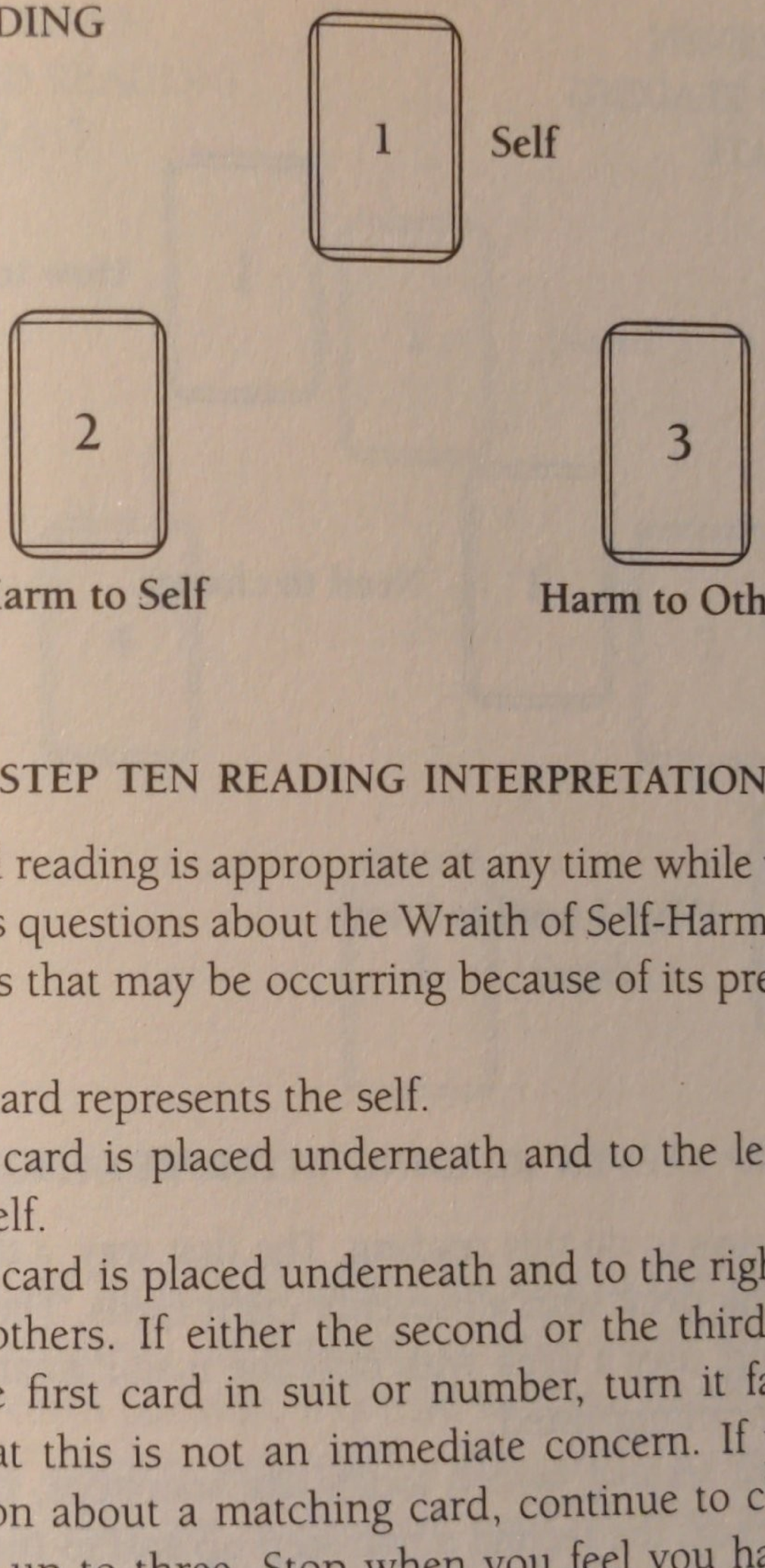


STEP NINE READING INTERPRETATION

This five-card reading begins with two cards side by side. The next three are placed on top of one another from the bottom up, with the fourth card level with the first two.

- The first card represents a specific amend.
- The second card represents the method of making that amend.
- The third card is a caution about making the amend.
- The fourth card, in line with the first and second, represents hidden aspects.
- The fifth card represents the outcome.

STEP TEN READING TEMPLATE

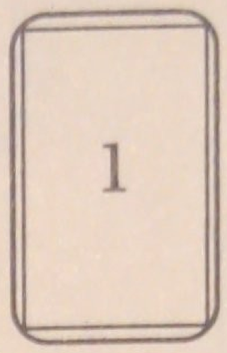


STEP TEN READING INTERPRETATION

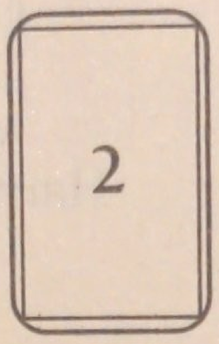
This three-card reading is appropriate at any time while working on the step. It answers questions about the Wraith of Self-Harm, and any harm to self or others that may be occurring because of its presence.

- The first card represents the self.
- A second card is placed underneath and to the left, representing harm to self.
- The third card is placed underneath and to the right, representing harm to others. If either the second or the third card does not match the first card in suit or number, turn it face down. This means that this is not an immediate concern. If you wish more information about a matching card, continue to choose one card at a time, up to three. Stop when you feel you have the answers you need.

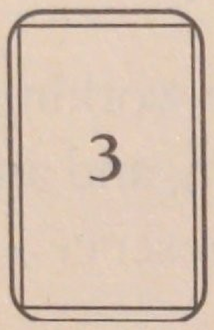
STEP ELEVEN
3-CARD READING
TEMPLATE



How to change



Need to change



What I need to know

STEP ELEVEN READING INTERPRETATIONS

There are two ways to do this reading. The first way, a three-card reading, uses a regular deck with all seventy-eight cards. The second way, a four-card reading, uses a deck with only the major arcana and the specific modified meanings listed.

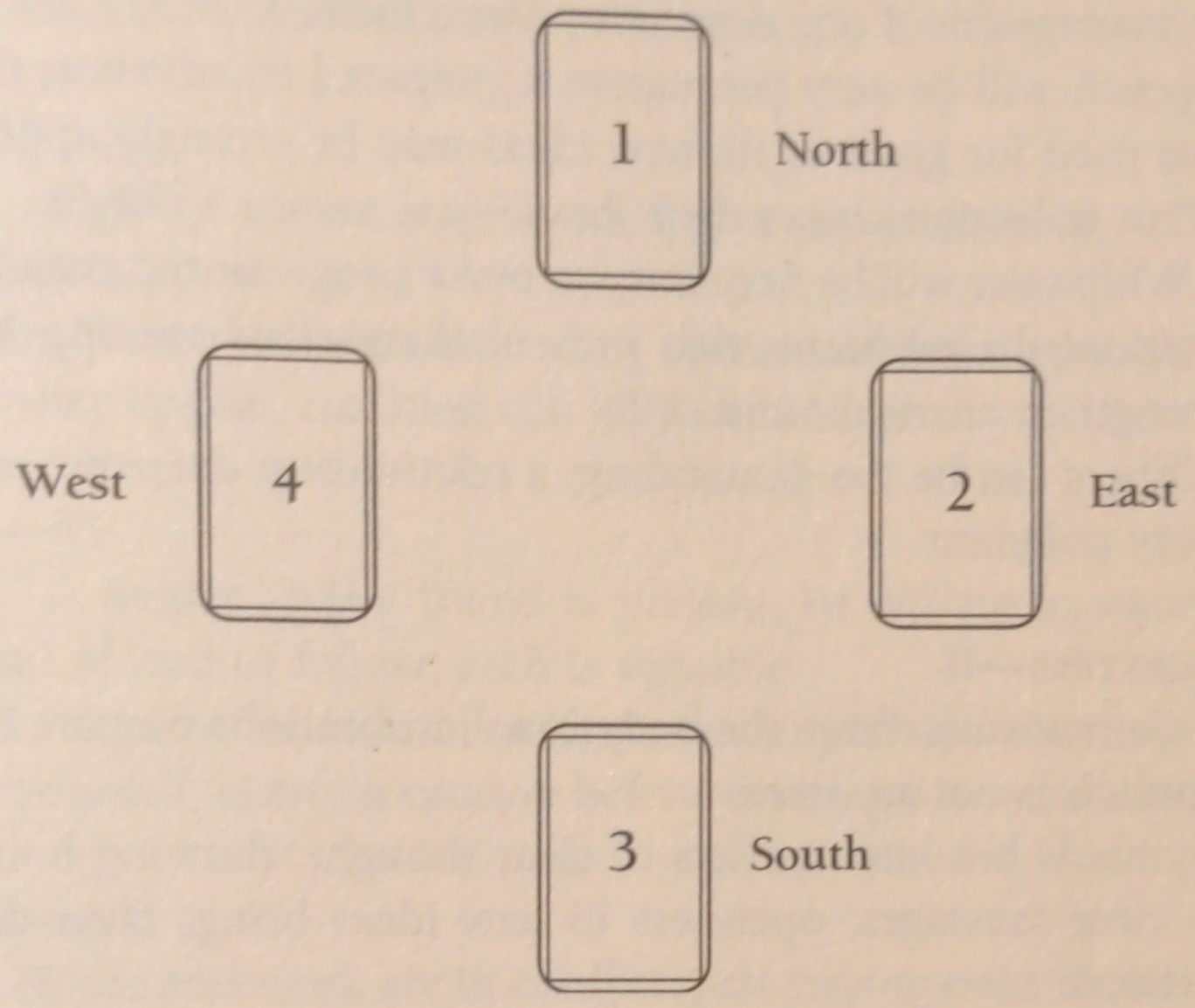
The *three-card reading,* which looks like stairsteps, begins with the first card on the left, the second a half-step up and to the right, and the third card another half-step up and to the right.

- The first card answers the question "What do I need to know?"
- The second card answers the questions "What or how do I need to change?"
- The third card answers the question "How shall I accomplish this change?"

The *four-card reading* template is laid out like the inner circle.

- The first card represents the North.
- The second card represents the East.
- The third card represents the South.
- The fourth card represents the West.

STEP ELEVEN
4-CARD READING
TEMPLATE



The cards have individual meanings, and in this Pagan system, the orientation determines the nuances of the overall interpretation. If a card is in the North position, it is read with the North interpretation. If it is in the other quarters, it is read by that quarter's interpretation. Read upright cards as they are. A reversed card contains a warning, rather than an actual reversed meaning. A card that has no quarter interpretations should be read either upright or reversed.

FOOL—0

North Take better care of your body; don't overlook simple things that make life easier; be careful around sexual issues.

East Beginnings look bright, but be careful to consider the outcome; boundaries are not as clear as they seem; insights.

South It is tempting to let others decide; be careful of "easy ways"; energy and good feelings abound.

West Nurturing comes unexpectedly; broadness rather than depth; ephemeral relationships.

MAGICIAN—I

North A body made strong by exercise and good food; perseverance in work will be rewarded; time is coming when finances will become more manageable if one does not procrastinate.

East Speech will be very persuasive if prepared in advance; thoughts can be used for good or ill; new ideas may be strongly appealing at first, but reflection shows their flaws.

South Willpower will be necessary to make progress; the path requires dedication; the problems that present themselves are opportunities to strengthen character and skill.

West Others can be too demanding; a relationship deepens; emotions are very poignant.

HIGH PRIESTESS—II

North Gain wisdom from the body; small indications prepare the way; an opinion is not an omen.

East Symbols become markers of clear thought; drawing boundaries gives clear messages; openness to new ideas brings clear direction and vision.

South Omens change their meaning as you continue; guides are obscure but reliable; leave markers for those who come after you.

West Colors have special significance; a criticism may be a blessing if found in the mouths of three or four; seek a vision.

EMPRESS—III

North Energy is available in abundance; new enjoyment of work and play; energy dissipates if hoarded.

East Mental activity stimulates happiness; delight in a new discovery; teaching and learning bring new energy.

South The more diligent the pursuit, the greater the joy; making choices comes more easily; beauty crosses the path.

West Positive emotional climate; giving and receiving bring happiness; that which delights you comes first.

EMPEROR—IV

North Slow growth is evident; honor age and wisdom even in the young; children begin to draw away.

East Simplicity is difficult to obtain; a child provides a key to new growth; reflection and meditation aid spiritual growth.

South Journey seems tedious without perspective; late starters increase their pace; time needs wisdom to nurture increase.
West Often maturity resembles being too tired; let others take some of the risks; emotions cool down with time.

POPE—V

Upright Rigidity causes stagnation; hypocrisy is present; unforeseen problems appear.
Reversed Make decisions only after counsel and thought; things not what they appear, tradition can help or hinder.

LOVERS—VI

Upright A helper and/or friend is present; be willing to stand beside instead of lead or follow; each is valuable.
Reversed A ploy for control or dominance; perhaps a time to be just with yourself; exercise caution before entering a new relationship.

CHARIOT—VII

North Home and work are in conflict; just staying even requires much effort; gain skill through practice.
East Double-mindedness; two or more ideas are in opposition; a deep conflict between the self's experience and knowledge and the insistence of the world around.
South Both choices look equally attractive; many roadblocks in the path; disputed areas appear.
West What is said and what is done are very different; promises bind in ways unforeseen; family has its own agenda.

STRENGTH—VIII

North Be watchful concerning your body's needs; work may try to overpower your life; balance is required.
East Clarify your intentions; study may be very helpful; new ideas come easily to you; starting over may be a good idea.
South The final choice of the path is yours; you are responsible for what you have done in the past; you may not see the entire picture now, but walk in what light you have.
West You must love yourself first; loving others comes easily to you; balance the needs and feelings of others with your own needs and feelings.

HERMIT—IX

North Spiritual truth is shown in the ways of nature; open up to the presence of the Divine; acknowledgment of well-done work.

East A glimpse of light leads to another endeavor; a closed door is an opportunity to explore what is present; time spent in a new place is beneficial.

South Things from the past may be unnecessary baggage; to become a part of this it is necessary to commit firmly; the veils between the spirit and the flesh can be gently moved and new combinations can be made.

West A door opens for someone else; carefully consider feelings as well as actions; hope comes from a spiritual source and brings new associations.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE—X

Upright Many options are available; even small seeds bring a rich harvest; intuition overcomes limitations; change is part of the cycle of life.

Reversed A time to wait for more clarity; things are still growing, pay attention to the simple realities around you; take an active part in change.

JUSTICE—XI

North Rest precedes meaningful activity; boredom signals a need for a change; the body's purpose is to grow old.

East Relaxation becomes deadly to the spirit when not used with moderation; compulsive striving; present it a different way to communicate clearly.

South Purpose is fulfilled in the journey as well as the destination; crisis obscures the purpose; clarity of purpose develops as the path is trod.

West Manipulation harms both the giver and the receiver; truth in relationship is difficult but necessary; one who gives and does not receive runs out of reserves.

HANGED MAN—XII

North Compulsive use becomes more problematical; say "No" to requests that drain your energy; be wary of an opportunity that has no limits.

East Define the self by drawing boundaries; too many interests dilute purpose; follow through with tasks.

South Too many commitments steal power; a path that is clear and narrow is wisest for now; physical means are required to set a limit.

West No one is responsible for another's choices, but each is accountable for their own actions; a small concession gets out of hand; a statement may have to be repeated many times to convince the hearer of the speaker's sincerity.

DEATH—XIII

North The snake sheds its old skin; learning becomes skill and expertise; aging requires accommodation.

East Honesty with self brings benefits; night changes into day, as we perceive Earth and the Sun's movement; awareness comes undesired and unexpected.

South Drudgery becomes joy with a different attitude; uphill and downhill change places; a smelly nuisance in the front yard is valuable fertilizer with a move to the backyard, and the other way around.

West Nurture change carefully; we are one with all; allow others to change and grow even if it is painful.

TEMPERANCE—XIV

North The season of the year reflects needs and solutions; bodies forced into unnatural patterns revolt; measured amounts of energy can accomplish much.

East The lunar cycle affects interests; a strict routine can be of use in limited ways; closing the mind gives time for reflection.

South Music, dance and/or song help with boredom; awareness of the need to stop and rest; late or early times are most productive.

West Time alone balances time together; friends with many backgrounds enrich; consider lessons from the ocean.

DEVIL—XV

Upright Confrontation, open conflict, difference of opinion.

Reversed Hidden agendas, turmoil within the self, point of choice about how to handle the situation.

TOWER—XVI

Upright Old ideas are changed; traditions that are hindrances are overcome with new ideas, freedom from useless or harmful thoughts, feelings and actions.

Reversed Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater; someone is coming on very strong; be sure you want to burn the bridge before you strike the match.

STAR—XVII

Upright Hope, fulfillment, transition to a new place of spiritual enlightenment; the sense of purpose you have always known becomes clearer.

Reversed Spiritual beings are involved in this situation; protection and cleansing; a chance for growth and adventure.

MOON—XVIII

Upright A time of growth that comes from facing truth, confusion clearing, visions, and connection with the divine.

Reversed You are deceiving yourself about something; focus on your intuition; view offers with a suspicious eye.

SUN—XIX

Upright Energy available, innocence, new possibilities, prosperity.

Reversed Unfocused energy, gullibility, lots of options, childishness.

JUDGMENT—XX

North What you have planted, you will reap; don't be surprised by the humor, silliness, and playfulness of the world around you; a good time to plant good seeds.

East To attain mastery you must practice; creativity comes easily; learn the lessons of your life and practice them.

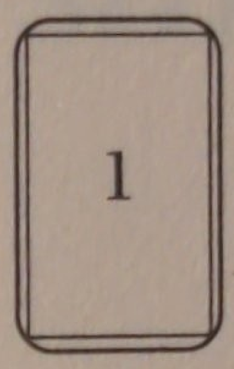
South One thoughtless word or action can create a forest fire; you may get more than you bargained for; deciding something only one time may not bring enough strength of will to carry out the decision.

West Things from the past may have grown to unrecognizable proportions; bottled-up emotions come out at unexpected times; someone is much more invested in a relationship than the other.

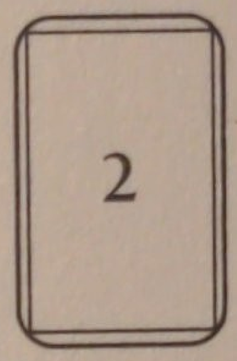
WORLD—XXI

North Abundance, sexual potency, power available.
East Creativity flows in and out, leadership, opportunities to learn.
South A clear path; strong will, enjoyment of the journey.
West Finishing a karmic debt or lesson, appropriate and comfortable feelings, sensitivity to relationships.

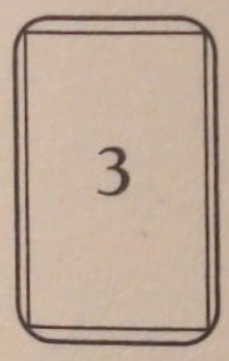
STEP TWELVE READING TEMPLATE



Spiritual awakening



How to offer this



How to practice recovery

STEP TWELVE READING INTERPRETATION

This three-card reading, again looking like stairsteps, begins with the first card on the right, the second a half-step down and to the left, and the third card another half-step down and to the left.

- The first card represents the spiritual awakening that has occurred.
- The second card represents a way to offer the opportunity to others.
- The third card represents how we can practice our recovery in our lives.

RECOVERY SPIRAL BOOK OF SHADOWS

Introduction

A Book of Shadows is something that Wiccans use to record their magic workings. It is somewhere between a private journal, a play's script, and a personal data assistant. It is often a hardbound black blank-page book, though the idea of a computer disk or CD of Shadows is gaining popularity. Here can be found spells, rituals, herbal concoctions, pictures, personal reflections, and anything else that seems important.

Sometime a Book of Shadows (BOS) focuses on a particular time or a specific kind of activity. The BOS here is designed to provide information and outlines for ritual activity, and is keyed to the book. In it you will find the outlines for the activities that the characters do.

If you choose to make your own BOS, you are free to copy what you like from this one. To make it more meaningful, record your experiences, results, and what changes you make in the rituals.

One advantage of a Book of Shadows, like keeping a journal, is that it helps us create a history for ourselves. Your history is sacred. Treat it as such.

Step One

HARM QUESTIONS

Answer each question for yourself and for your effect on those around you. Include partner or partners, children (biological or in your care), work associates, extended family, and others to whom you are responsible.

- Is there lying? About what? Why?
- Is there cheating? Stealing?
- Violence? Yelling? Arguments that go nowhere, or always end the same way?

- Whining? Threats? The "cold shoulder" of withdrawal or the "guilt trip"?
- Stepping in to keep others from experiencing the consequences of their actions?
- A sense of unfairness, in terms of time, energy, or resources?
- Failure to do what was promised? On time? Well? With a good attitude?
- Evidence of passive or active suicidal or homicidal behavior or thoughts?
- Financial consequences? Legal consequences? Civil consequences?
- Confusion, crisis, misunderstanding, or a sense of futility?
- Constant illnesses, nerve problems, or sleep problems?

RITUAL FORMAT

Value results from using a ritual format over and over again. If we have a clear idea of the structure, and perhaps some of the words, we can focus more clearly on our work. Therefore, most of the rituals in this book will begin and end with the same format. The changes will be in the purpose for raising energy, the method used, and the direction the energy is sent. Follow these steps, or adapt them in a way that suits you. Establish a standard pattern for all your ritual work. What seems like a complicated process at first will be worth the work to establish a regular format. As you come to associate these words, gestures, and steps with your spiritual and recovery work, you may find that just starting the ritual helps you feel more calm and connected. Here is an overview.

- First, establish clearly the reason for the ritual.
  - Assemble the items needed. Some will be things you may already have and use. Special items are listed at the beginning of each ritual.
  - Prepare yourself. This may include purifying your body (perhaps washing your hands), putting on a special piece of clothing or jewelry, or just spending a few moments in meditation to remove yourself from daily distractions.
- Cleanse and create the sacred space.
- Raise energy and direct it.
- Give thanks to the Divine.
- End the ritual.

STEP RITUALS

Step rituals are written for individuals, but they work well between two people or in a group. I have tried to use the words and concepts of the Serenity Prayer, a simple but profound expression, as a guide for much of the repeated ritual work. The prayer says:

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference.

The steps themselves are the focus of raising energy in the ritual. There is one ritual for each step. The work done outside the ritual, including the Tarot readings, may be helpful in finding the words or themes that make the specific ritual meaningful at any given time. Because recovery is a spiral, it is often beneficial to do a step ritual more than once, returning to it when the work of this step comes into focus.

You need a private space to work, if possible. The rituals also assume that you have the ability to move around. Please adapt them to your situation. You absolutely *do not* have to do things a particular way. This is only one option, and it has the virtue of being very simple and easy to remember. After you have done the ritual a couple of times, you may find that a regular ritual format becomes a comfort.

Depending on your living situation, you may need to be creative. One friend works in the bathroom while the door is closed. Another has young children, so he sets up a playpen and puts *his* stuff and himself in it. That way the kids can't get to him, but he can keep an eye on them.

Another friend has an altar that sits on a cork coaster in her desk drawer. She uses a feather to represent the East, a twig for the South, a tiny seashell for the West, and a rock for the North. With a permanent marker, she drew a spiral on the coaster to represent the Center. Using fast-food salt packets, she sprinkles some to cleanse the space; she empowers the rest and offers some in thanksgiving. She writes the number of the step on the packet and uses the consecrated salt in various ways.

If you already have tools, space, or "stuff," it is perfectly okay to continue to use them. It's also okay to buy stuff, receive it as a gift, recycle things from other uses, or make your own. This is your program and your ritual.

PREPARING THE SELF

First, figure out *why* you are doing this ritual. It may be simply because you are giving the Pagan Recovery Spiral an honest try, even if you are skeptical about it. Reading over the instructions may intrigue you. Whatever your reason, be clear with yourself. Writing it down may be helpful. Say it in a single sentence out loud three times, beginning with "I want." For instance, you might say "I want to not harm myself by trying to make everything perfect," or "I want to create a marker for Step One."

Second, assemble your tools and anything else the ritual requires. If you wish to cleanse the circle with salt, water, or something else, you need those items and containers. If you wish to light candles in the four quarters of the circle, you need candles, safe holders, matches, and something to douse the flames if an accident happens. Representations of the quarters, personally meaningful items, items offered in thanksgiving, and tools are at your discretion. You can have a copy of the script, or cue yourself with cards that have the words or actions written on them.

CREATING SACRED SPACE

Close your eyes and take five deep breaths.

As you breathe the first time, imagine that you are inhaling *serenity* and exhaling *dread*.

The second breath brings simple *acceptance*, and the exhale removes your *concern for the things you cannot change*.

With the third breath you inhale *courage* and exhale *reluctance to change yourself*.

The fourth breath brings in *wisdom* and exhales *denial*.

The fifth breath reminds you *who you are*.

Next, prepare the space. Making a sweeping-out motion with your hands, turn counterclockwise from the East, and end with the Center.

Pause first at the North, saying: *Be gone, harm to my body.*

Continue your turn to the West and say: *Be gone, harm to my heart.*

When you face the South, say: *Be gone, harm to my will.*

In the East say: *Be gone, harm to my mind.*

Stand in the Center and say: *Be gone, harm to my spirit.*

To cast the circle, point your finger straight out, beginning in the East and moving clockwise or deosil toward the South. As you draw in the air with your finger (or a wand, or whatever), imagine a trail of light remaining where you have pointed. As you return to the East, imagine

the light expanding and forming a circle completely around you like a ball.

Again, beginning in the East, and going clockwise, welcome the quarters and the Center. As you face each quarter, make a gesture of respect and offer your welcome. If you are going to light candles to represent the quarters, this is a good time to do so.

TO THE EAST

Daybreak teachers, guardians, and guides
Hail, and be welcome. Come inside.
What shall I learn? I want to know.
Grant me serenity. Help me grow.

TO THE SOUTH

Noontime teachers, guardians, and guides
Hail, and be welcome. Come inside.
How shall I choose? I want to know
Grant me acceptance. Help me grow.

TO THE WEST

Evening teachers, guardians, and guides
Hail, and be welcome. Come inside.
Who shall I love? I want to know.
Grant me courage. Help me grow.

TO THE NORTH

Nighttime teachers, guardians, and guides
Hail, and be welcome. Come inside.
When shall I act? I want to know.
Grant me wisdom. Help me grow.

TO THE CENTER

Spirit teachers, guardians, and guides
Hail, and be welcome. Come inside.
Who shall I be? I want to know.
Grant me hope. Help me grow.

CALLING RHYME

Circle is cast. I am here
Present be hope, gone be fear
What I sow, so shall I reap
Mine to give and mine to keep

Truth and honor light my way
Past and future and today.

RAISING THE ENERGY AND DIRECTING IT

State the step and the purpose of your ritual aloud.

"This ritual is about Step _____ [read or say the step or steps]. My purpose is to _____."

Now do the specific things that are right for you, using the suggestions in this book as you choose.

GIVING THANKS

After you have done the working, thank those who helped you in some way. This may be verbal, silent, or by way of an offering.

RHYME OF THANKS

What I sow is what I reap
Mine to give and mine to keep
Gratitude shows me the way
Love for love I will repay.

ENDING THE RITUAL

To release the quarters, make a gesture of respect as you address each quarter, beginning in the Center. If you lit candles, extinguish the flame now. Imagine the energy of the fire going to your intention.

IN THE CENTER

By air and fire, by sea and land
Thank you from my heart and hand
Spirit Seeker, Guardian, and Guide
Feel free to go, or here reside.

IN THE NORTH

By air and fire, by sea and land
Thank you from my heart and hand
Nighttime Seeker, Guardian, and Guide
Feel free to go, or here reside.

IN THE WEST

By air and fire, by sea and land
Thank you from my heart and hand
Evening Seeker, Guardian, and Guide
Feel free to go, or here reside.

IN THE SOUTH
By air and fire, by sea and land
Thank you from my heart and hand
Noontime Seeker, Guardian, and Guide
Feel free to go, or here reside.

IN THE EAST
By air and fire, by sea and land
Thank you from my heart and hand
Daytime Seeker, Guardian, and Guide
Feel free to go, or here reside.

To open the circle, imagine the light you called at the beginning completely around you like a ball. Now imagine that the light goes back into you until the globe is gone, leaving only the circle. Point your finger or tool, beginning in the East and turning counterclockwise to the North. As you draw in the air, imagine the trail of light returning to you. As you return to the East, and the circle is gone, say:

Circle is open. I am here
Present is hope. Gone is fear.

Step Two

BELIEF/POWER QUESTIONS

- What do you believe about this (content)? Where and how and from whom did you learn this?
- Why do you think this is so (assent)? Does this belief match your experience? In the past? Now? Does this belief make sense to you now?
- What emotions come up for you about this (living faith)? Are these familiar? What else is like this? Where is the power? Is that helpful or harmful?
- What actions do you take about this? What choices can you now make? Where is the power now?

CENTERING AND INNER CIRCLE

Follow your standard procedures for ritual (described in Step One). This ritual is intended to help you find a personal place of contact with the Divine and with yourself. The beginning and end call on the imagery of *chakras*, a Sanskrit word referring to a set of energy points in the body. Once you have established your inner circle, you need not go through all these steps to explore it. This first time is a voyage of discovery. You can tape-record the following meditation to play during the ritual, or ask someone to read it aloud to you.

RAISING AND DIRECTING POWER

The Second Step says, "Came to believe that a power within ourselves and our world could restore us to balance." The purpose of this ritual is to contact a power in our world and in ourselves to restore us to balance.

Close your eyes, and locate the center of yourself.

Take three cleansing breaths, breathing out more than you breathed in. Allow the energy to flow from the earth into you and allow it to begin to gather at your center. Imagine that the world around you is fading and that you are more and more aware of yourself.

Imagine that somehow your consciousness is at the very top of your head and surrounded with glowing white light.

Allow your consciousness to move down, to the area behind and between your eyes, where the light is a deep purple.

Allow your consciousness to move further down, to the area of your throat, where the light is a lovely blue.

Allow your consciousness to move down again, to the area of your heart, where the lights are green and pink.

Allow your consciousness to move down, to your solar plexus, where the light is a bright yellow.

Your consciousness is moving down again, to your belly, where the light is a glowing orange.

And down again, into your genitals, where the light is red.

The red becomes darker and darker, and soon you are surrounded by the safe and beautiful black velvet of a starless night. Enjoy this warmth and safety. Find yourself traveling through this velvet tunnel until you reach what you know to be your center.

Greeting the Directions

You become aware of growing light in one area and turn toward your internal East and greet the new day's sunrise, feeling the wind lightly caressing you.

Turning to your inner right, you notice the light growing. As you face your inner South, you notice the light is bright, the Sun is overhead. Greet the noon warmth.

Turning again to your inner right, you notice the Sun setting over a body of water. Greet the sunset.

Turning again to your inner right, you notice the night sky overhead, with stars and possibly the Moon shining on the landscape. Greet the night.

Becoming aware that you are in the center of this circle, greet yourself and the sacred within you.

Discovering the Tools

Facing again to the inner East's sunrise, you notice a tool that cuts the air, or draws boundaries, such as a knife, a feather, or a pen. Spend a few moments examining the tool, and place it back where you found it.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner South's noontime, you notice a tool that helps you on your way, directing your power, such as a rod, a wand, or a staff. Spend a few moments examining the tool, and place it back where you found it.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner West's sunset, you notice a tool that holds other things, such as a cup, an amphora, or a box. Spend a few moments examining the tool, and place it back where you found it.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner North's night, you notice a tool that is of the earth, such as a rock, a plate, or a plant. Spend a few moments examining the tool, and place it back where you found it.

Becoming conscious of the Center, you realize that *you* are the tool of the sacred. Examine and praise yourself.

Discovering the Beings

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner East's sunrise, you notice a being to aid you in new beginnings, creativity, learning, and drawing boundaries. Spend a few moments with the being.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner South's noontime, you notice a being to aid you on your path, with your choices, and directing your power. Spend a few moments with the being.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner West's sunset, you notice a being to aid you in relationships with yourself and others. Spend a few moments with the being.

Turning to your inner right, facing again to the inner North's night, you notice a being to aid you with the practical things of life. Spend a few moments with the being.

Becoming aware of the Center, you may notice a being or beings that will aid you to bring forth your true self. Spend a few moments here.

FAREWELL

You become aware that it is time to go. Therefore, begin by honoring yourself and the center. Bid Hail and Farewell.

Facing your inner North, honor that which will aid you with practical matters. Bid Hail and Farewell as the stars and moon dim.

Turning to your inner left, facing your inner West, honor that which will aid you with relationships. Bid Hail and Farewell as the sunset dims.

Turning to your inner left, facing your inner South, honor that which will aid you with direction, choices and journey. Bid Hail and Farewell as the noonday sun dims.

Turning to your inner left, facing your inner East, honor that which will aid you with creativity, new beginnings, and boundaries. Bid Hail and Farewell as the sunrise dims.

ASCENT

You find yourself again in the safe and warm velvet darkness. You begin to travel the warm tunnel until you arrive at your root, where the light becomes a deep and lovely red.

Your consciousness continues to ascend to your belly, where the light is orange.

And further up to your solar plexus, with the yellow light.

And up to your heart with its greens and pinks.

And further to your throat where the light is blue.

And further to your third eye, with its purple light.

And at last to your crown, with the white light.

Breathe deeply, touch your hands to the earth, open your eyes, and find yourself in the here and now.

Take a few moments to write down what you noticed.

Inner Circle *Date* _____

East Landscape _____

Tool _____

Being _____

South Landscape _____

Tool _____

Being _____

West Landscape _____

Tool _____

Being _____

North Landscape _____

Tool _____

Being _____

Center Landscape _____

Tool _____

Being _____

Notes

Step Three

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in your usual way (refer back to Step One if you need to). Once you are in sacred space, say:

"This ritual is about Step Three, which says, 'Made a decision to move our lives and our will toward that Divine Presence.' My purpose is to make and mark my decision."

Imagine your inner circle, spending what time you need there. Consider whether or not you have reservations about taking this step. If you do, now is a good time to recognize them. Address the Divinities in turn. Tell them your truth, including your reservations, and make your decision.

Repeat your decision in a number of ways. You may wish to use music, dance, voice, art, movement, or silence. When you sense that you have generated enough energy, gather it up and offer it to the Divine Presence.

Offer your thanks, and close the circle.

Step Four

STEP FOUR QUESTIONS

DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

1. What is currently concerning me?
2. What incidents and behaviors are related to this concern?
   - Current incidents and behaviors
   - Older incidents and behaviors that are similar
   - Words, pictures, feelings, smells, or other things that pop into my mind
3. What do I tell myself about these incidents and behaviors?
4. How do I describe my own attitudes and actions?
5. Whom or what do I resent?
6. Whom or what do I fear?
7. When I am involved in these things, what do I feel?
8. What benefits do I derive from these things?
9. How do these things protect me? What am I being protected from?
10. What circumstances occur around these things?
11. Do I have similar reactions or feelings about other people or situations?
12. How am I harming myself and others with these behaviors or in these incidents?

DESCRIBING THE PAST

1. Whom or what do I still resent?
2. Whom or what do I still fear?

3. What assumptions did I make?
4. How do I see myself in these incidents and behaviors?
5. How do I feel when I remember these incidents and behaviors?
6. What kinds of things do I tell myself I *ought* to have done or been?
7. What did I learn about others from these incidents and behaviors?
8. What did I learn about myself from these incidents and behaviors?
9. What did I learn about the consequences of my behaviors?
10. What did I learn about the consequences of others' behaviors?
11. What did I learn about responsibility, ability, and accountability?
12. How did I harm myself and others with these behaviors or in these incidents?

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in the usual way.

"This ritual is about Step Four, which says, 'Made searching and fearless ethical inventory of myself.' My purpose is to call back my power."

Imagine your inner circle, spending what time you need there. Notice that places in some directions feel less powerful than others. Allow images to come to you. These are places where you have given away your power.

Open your eyes and ground yourself again. Going to each direction, call back the power to yourself.

I call back my power of my memory.
I call back my power of activity.
I call back my power to speak and to choose.
I call back my power to bind and to loose.

Feel the power flow into you.

Go back to your inner circle and energize the less powerful places with what you have called back. You may need to do this several times.

Offer your thanks, and close the circle.

Step Five

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in the usual way.

"This ritual is about Step Five, which says, 'Admitted to myself, to the Divine Presence, and to others the exact nature of my harm.' My purpose is to make the transition to connecting with others."

Imagine your inner circle, spending what time you need there. Ask the being in each quarter to listen to your fifth step. Speak simply and honestly, being aware of their responses.

Offer your thanksgiving in the usual way, and close the circle.

Step Six

DECISION QUESTIONS

1. Is what I learned appropriate to apply to situations today? Why?
2. Are the benefits and protection truly benefits and protections? Why?
3. Are there other ways I could respond or initiate in these situations? How? Are they harmful or helpful? To whom?
4. How do I want to change myself?
5. How will I cope with similar situations?
6. How will I continue to grow in this area?

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in the usual way.

"This ritual is about Step Six, which says, 'Were entirely ready to have our harmful patterns replaced by ethical coping skills.' My purpose is to prepare myself to replace harm with help."

Visit each quarter and the Center. Take a few moments to say aloud the things you have discovered in the Step Six questions. Be aware of any responses.

After you have talked to the Center, close your eyes. Imagine that you put all the things that no longer serve you into a large clay pot.

Turning to the East, imagine the wind blows on the contents. In the South, imagine fire. In the West, imagine water. In the North, imagine yourself putting dirt and rocks into the clay pot until all the things you

have placed in it are covered. As you face the Center, simply present the pot and its contents, stating that you have done your preparation, symbolized by the pot and its contents. If you are using a real pot, leave it in your sacred space. If you are using an astral pot, place it in the care of the Center.

Offer your thanksgiving and close the circle.

Step Seven

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in your usual way.

"This ritual is about Step Seven, which says, 'Asked the Divine Ones to transform us, giving us rebirth in our lives.' My purpose is to seek rebirth."

Journey to your inner circle.

In this ritual, you will simply go to each quarter, and the Center, asking for whatever information or help the beings in your quarters or the Divine Ones are willing to give you. Listen carefully, even if what you hear is not to your liking immediately.

When and if you are ready, ask the Divine Ones to transform you.

Go back around the circle and thank the Center and each quarter.

Return to your sacred space.

Offer your thanks and close the circle.

Step Eight

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in your usual way.

I wrote the poem that is the heart of this ritual for my cousin. He had wrestled for years with his addictions and finally chose to take his own life. When I realized that I could not make amends to him in this life, I chose to bless him, myself, and the relationship we shared.

"This ritual is about Step Eight, which says, 'Made a list of all beings we had harmed, beginning with ourselves and including our world, and became willing to make amends to them all.' My purpose is to learn about my spiritual willingness."

For each person on your list, recite the blessings below, substituting their names for "you," your name for "me," and both of your names for "us."

Truth enlighten you
Laughter encourage you
Hope inspire you
Love enfold you

Blessings cross your waxing

Prejudice alert you
Injustice nauseate you
Persecution haunt you
Slavery outrage you

Freedom cross your path

Wisdom beneath you
Growth before you
Peace behind you
Silence beside you

Integrity cross your waning

Light guide you
Fire warm you
Water prepare you
Earth cover you

Simplicity cross your death

Rest cleanse you
Healing restore you
Choice renew you
Life reclaim you

Beauty cross your journey

Truth enlighten me
Laughter encourage me
Hope inspire me
Love enfold me

Blessings cross my waxing

Prejudice alert me
Injustice nauseate me
Persecution haunt me
Slavery outrage me

Freedom cross my path

Wisdom beneath me
Growth before me
Peace behind me
Silence beside me

Integrity cross my waning

Light guide me
Fire warm me
Water prepare me
Earth cover me

Simplicity cross my death

Rest cleanse me
Healing restore me
Choice renew me
Life reclaim me

Beauty cross my journey

Truth enlighten us
Laughter encourage us
Hope inspire us
Love enfold us

Blessings cross our waxing

Prejudice alert us
Injustice nauseate us
Persecution haunt us
Slavery outrage us

Freedom cross our path

Wisdom beneath us
Growth before us
Peace behind us
Silence beside us

Integrity cross our waning

Light guide us
Fire warm us
Water prepare us
Earth cover us

Simplicity cross our death

Rest cleanse us
Healing restore us
Choice renew us
Life reclaim us

Beauty cross our journey

Offer your thanks and close the circle.

Step Nine

RITUAL

For this ritual you will need about twenty to twenty-five small stones or marbles and a small bag for the person to whom you owe amends. Mark three of the stones in some way, perhaps with a felt-tipped pen.

Cleanse, cast, and call.

"This ritual is about Step Nine, which says, 'Made direct amends to all whenever possible, except when to do so would violate the Rede.' My intention is to discover my willingness to make amends."

Offer your amends stones to each direction in turn, placing the "right" number of small stones in the bag. Use your intuitive skills rather than choosing. After you have chosen, see how many of the marked stones you placed in the bag. No marked stones mean that you are ready to make your amends. One marked stone means you are not quite ready yet to make your amends. Two marked stones mean that amends might not be possible. Three marked stones are a warning that you may be violating the Rede by harming yourself or someone else. Then spend some time with the stones and note any guidance you receive. During ritual, plan how and when you will work with Step Nine.

Offer your thanks and close the circle.

Step Ten

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call.

"This ritual is about Step Ten, which says, 'Continued to take personal ethical inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it and corrected it. In this ritual I seek to discover more about my shadow, my Wraith of Self-Harm, and to correct what I can.'"

Journey to your inner circle, and greet the directions in your usual way. Become aware that in the area of your inner North, there is a cave that is the "Cave of Self-Harm."

Spend some time noticing what it is like, and then gain entrance to it. When you enter, notice a being there. Notice the appearance of the cave may change as you explore it. At some point, you notice the being is starving. Address the being, asking the following questions and waiting for the answers.

"What names do I call you?" (there may be more than one)

"For what do you hunger?"

After you have heard the answers, acknowledge the being as your shadow. Say something like:

"I accept that you are of me. As I heal, so you will be healed."

Then feed the shadow something that will help it, rather than harm it.

Bring the shadow to your inner circle, and introduce it to the directions and the Center by all its names. Say something like:

"I present to you (name), also known as (other names), who is of me."

If you wish, you may return to the cave area and see if any changes have occurred. Take whatever time you need to prepare a safe and comfortable place for your shadow self, or bring it with you when you go back to your sacred space.

Bid farewell to the directions and return to your sacred space.

Offer your thanks and close the circle.

Step Eleven

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call.

"This ritual is about Step Eleven, which says, 'Sought through activ-

ity and meditation to improve our conscious knowledge and contact with the Divine Presence, seeking only to move in harmony with the greatest good.' My purpose is to learn how to be more in contact with the Divine Presence and to make better choices."

After you have done this once, allow yourself to review your life since the last time you performed this ritual. Consider each incident or situation. Imagine yourself observing the situation as though you were watching a movie. What could you change about your attitude or actions to improve things? What is beyond your control? Ask the Divine Presence for wisdom to know the difference.

Next, imagine yourself as a wiser being, more directly in touch with the Divine Presence.

Finally, imagine yourself acting as that wiser being.

Offer your thanks in the usual way and close the circle.

Step Twelve

RITUAL

Cleanse, cast, and call in the usual way.

"This ritual is about Step Twelve, which says, 'Having had spiritual awakenings as results of these steps, we offered this opportunity to others and practiced these principles in all of our interactions.' My purpose is to affirm my spiritual awakenings."

Beginning in the East, face each direction with your eyes closed. Remember what you experienced in this area before you began your recovery. Slowly opening your eyes, honor the spiritual awakenings you have had. Ask how you can best offer this to others, and listen carefully to what your intuition says. Finally, speak aloud how you intend to continue your awakening in the next few days or weeks.

Offer your thanks and close the circle.

Conclusion

The 12 Steps are the pattern of the Recovery Spiral. This Book of Shadows is only one embellishment. Each time we move through the Spiral, we discover new wonders and add new embellishments of our own. May we continue in the joy of recovery and discovery, delighting in the process.

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